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ARGOSY

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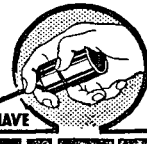

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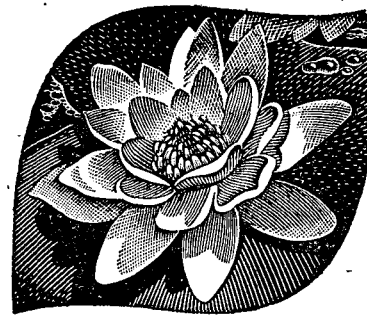

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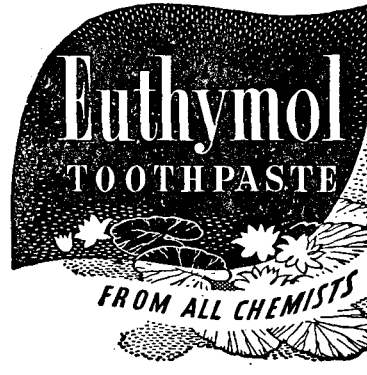

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ARGOSY

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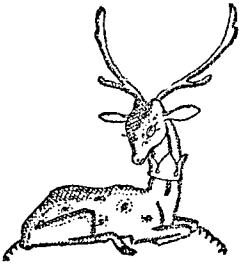
Arise, My Love

MY beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up,
My love, my fair one,
And come away.

For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle
Is heard in our land;
The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs,
And the vines with the tender grape
Give a good smell.

Arise,
My love, my fair one,
And come away.

The Song of Solomon



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NABOTH'S VINEYARD

So that was the way the wind blew!

by JOHN MOORE

JANE SPRY was a cheerful, plump little widow, Spry by name and spry by nature, whose improvident husband had left her with just enough money to live on and nothing over for gadding about. She was generally to be found, therefore, in the neighbourhood of her pleasant thatched cottage which adjoined the eastern boundary of Jacob Grindley's big fruit farm.

She kept the cottage spotlessly clean and the garden immaculately tidy: never a speck of dust in her sitting room nor a dandelion in her herbaceous border. She was always busy: scrubbing, cooking, making her own clothes, digging the kitchen garden, weeding the flower beds, mowing the lawn. She was as provident as her husband had been spendthrift. She grew eleven sorts of herbs for flavouring her dishes; confected jams, pickles and curious candies in their proper seasons; and made each year six different kinds of home-made wine with which to entertain the neighbours.

Adjoining the cottage was a small cherry orchard she owned, planted with the choicest trees. This also she tended with care, pruning the trees when they needed it and even painting their trunks with bands of cart grease to prevent the winter moths from crawling up to lay their eggs among the new buds.

It was this excellent orchard which first aroused Jacob Grindley's interest in Jane. He needed a cherry orchard, he told himself, to tide him over the seasons when there was a poor market for apples and plums. Moreover, the orchard would neatly round off his estate. It really *belonged* to the estate, thought Jacob Grindley; it lay within his natural boundaries, whatever the title-deeds might say, and it was ridiculous that it should be owned by a cottager who had no real use for it at all. However, she was a poor woman, with no man to advise her, and Jacob Grindley did not doubt that he would be able to buy the orchard cheap. He was the meanest, most miserable old devil you can possibly imagine.

For instance, he owned a wireless set which at that time—all this happened nearly twenty years ago—was the only one in the whole district; and in this way he got the latest weather forecasts.

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But if a neighbour asked him what the wireless had to say about the prospects of a frost, he'd always shake his head and say: "The blessed thing wouldn't work this evening . . . all I could get out of it were squeaks and groans . . ."

It was said of Jacob Grindley that he would never give anything away, not even a civil good morning; but it must be confessed that when, on a blue summer day, he took a walk across to Jane Spry's orchard—on reconnaissance as it were, to find out how little he need offer for it—he swept off his hat to her almost graciously and even favoured her with the sour semblance of a smile.

For there was Jane, high up on a ladder, picking the bright cherries; and in a blue frock which matched the summer sky, and a broad-brimmed straw hat which she'd made out of raffia at the Women's Institute, she really looked charming. Her legs, of which Mr. Grindley had an extraordinarily good view, were plump but by no means unpleasing. Her arms, which were plump and pretty also, were tanned to an exquisite shade of golden brown. Her voice, as she answered his good morning from among the leafy boughs, was more tuneful, it seemed to Mr. Grindley, than that of a song-thrush.

"Good morning, Mr. Grindley," said Jane most musically from the top of the tree.

"Fine lot of cherries, Ma'am, you've got this year," said Mr. Grindley, and then could have bitten his tongue off, for it occurred to him that if he admitted the crop was a good one she would charge him at least ten pounds more for the orchard when he came to buy it. "But the caterpillars," he added hurriedly, "are something awful."

"I know," said Jane. "I've never seen so many. They're spoiling the fruit."

"Dear me," said Mr. Grindley, "you should have sprayed the trees in April;" and once again he wished he could swallow his words, for Jane replied sweetly:

"That's very true, Mr. Grindley; and next season I shall take your advice. In fact, if you don't mind, I shall make so bold as to borrow your sprayer!"

Now Mr. Grindley dreaded the remotest possibility that anybody would ask him for the loan of anything; but he reflected that by next season the orchard would be safely in his hands and the woman would have no use for the sprayer, so he gave a kind of assenting grunt at which Jane exclaimed charmingly:

"How *very* kind of you, Mr. Grindley! And now as it's such a hot day, perhaps you'll come into my cottage and have a glass of my home-made wine!"

Whereupon she climbed down the ladder and led him through

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the wicket-gate, under the archway of crimson rambler roses, and so into her cool and neat and chintzy parlour.

"Now which will you have?" she asked him, as she went to the cupboard. "Dandelion, elderflower, parsnip, damson, cherry or green gooseberry?"

"I'm a teetotaller really," said Mr. Grindley: which was quite true, for he kept no drink at home and he never dared to enter a pub in case by some appalling accident he should be put into the position of having to buy somebody a drink.

"Excellent," said Jane, "for these are teetotal beverages. You'd better try the cherry; I always think it's the nicest." With this she poured him out a good tumberful of the bright pink liquid, cut him a slice of Madeira cake, and handed him both with a gracious smile. Before she closed the cupboard door, Mr. Grindley noticed with approbation the long rows of pickle jars and jam-pots all neatly labelled: "Piccalilli 1922," "Walnuts," "Onions," "Strawb. 1923," "Black B. and Apple" and so on.

What an admirable woman! How accomplished! How tidy! How provident! How industrious! Perhaps it was at this moment that there first entered into Mr. Grindley's mind the vague, unformulated notion that he might more profitably acquire the cherry orchard by the process of acquiring Jane; but as yet it was the veriest zephyr of a thought which blew through his head without leaving any definite impression. He was aware only that he felt slightly discomposed; and to put himself at ease, he raised his glass and took a sip of the wine. Immediately he took another sip. Goodness, how delicious the stuff was! Mr. Grindley had never tasted anything like it before. He took a third sip, which, to tell the truth, prolonged itself into a gulp, and, as he felt the sweet cordial liquid slipping down his throat, his chilly soul was pervaded with a warmth it had never experienced before. Mr. Grindley didn't know much about nectar, but surely this was nectar if anything was!

"Will you have another glass?" said Jane demurely.

"Well . . . er . . . if you're *quite* sure it's teetotal," said Mr. Grindley.

"All we old ladies consider it so," said Jane.

"Old!" exclaimed Mr. Grindley. "Really, Ma'am, I cannot allow—"

But his tongue was unaccustomed to gallantry, and even with the aid of cherry wine that was as far as he got. He drank the second glass of cherry wine, thanked his hostess clumsily, and hurriedly took his departure.

Walking home, however, he walked upon air. That zephyr,

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that mere catspaw of an idea which had momentarily stirred the sullen deeps of his brain now blew a full gale. What a perfect housewife! What wonderful wine! How clever she was! And how careful! Such a woman would actually *save* a man money! She would be a positive investment! And the cherry orchard thrown in! Of course he must marry her; he must marry her soon!

It cannot be denied that there were certain still small voices in Mr. Grindley's brain which succeeded in making themselves heard in spite of the roar of the great gale; such voices as: "Nevertheless, weddings are extremely expensive," and "Women's clothes are said to cost a great deal." But the cherry wine silenced them, and Mr. Grindley's progress towards his farmhouse continued upon air and indeed appeared quite spectacular to those who were fortunate enough to witness it.

Of these, one reliably reported in the *Fox and Hounds* that Mr. Grindley had actually smiled. He added that it was a vacuous and foolish grin, as if the old man had gone soft in the head suddenly. Another declared that Mr. Grindley had been heard singing, and that the tune was "Cherry Ripe." A third stated that he had encountered Mr. Grindley at the main gates of his farm where, in his forty-acre field, a number of women were engaged in picking peas. These women, bent low over the peas, proceeded down the rows in line abreast, head into the wind like sheep in a storm, and the back view, which Mr. Grindley and the narrator enjoyed together, was certainly remarkable. Mr. Grindley, indeed, was alleged to have slapped his thigh, shouted "Glorious!" and burst into a hearty guffaw. This part of the story, however, was generally disbelieved.

Of course it didn't last. The brief glory faded. But though the glory was gone, his determination to marry Jane (home-made wine, jam, pickles, Madeira cake, cherry orchard and all) obstinately remained. Grimly, laboriously, and miserably, Mr. Grindley, at fifty seven, set about the terrible task of courtship.

And, as you may imagine, his suit was quite hopeless; for Jane, whose last husband had been a spendthrift, had not the slightest intention of going to the opposite extreme and marrying a miser. To tell the truth, she had long ago determined not to marry anybody, for she found life exceedingly pleasant in her little cottage, and she was not at all anxious to spoil it by permitting the nightly intrusion of a man's dirty boots upon her well-swept carpets. For companionship, she possessed a Siamese cat, which was meticulously clean; for occupation, she had her garden, her cherry orchard, her winemaking and her needlework; for entertainment, she had the Village Hall weekly whist drive, which, by

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a mixture of ingenuous charm and ingenious cheating, she generally won.

Indeed, she was completely content; and actually, the trifling hospitality and the brief coquetry which she had shown to Mr. Grindley on that summer morning were directed towards no other purpose than that of persuading him to lend her his sprayer. You can guess with what surprise she greeted this same miserable old Jacob Grindley when she answered a knock at the door a few days later. He was standing with his hat under his arm, a small leather-bound book in one hand and a basket of strawberries in the other—both of which he awkwardly presented to her.

It was true that the book, which was called *Virtue in Verse, or Sober Thoughts for Quiet Hours*, had lain unread in Mr. Grindley's attic ever since his grandmother, long deceased, had bought it for sixpence at a second-hand bookseller's; it was true, also, that the strawberry trade, in consequence of a glut, had recently reached its lowest level in ten years. But let us forget these coincidences and record that Jacob Grindley, who had never before in all his life given anything to anybody, now stood upon Jane's doorstep bearing gifts in both hands.

This visit was the forerunner of many more. At first Jane regarded them with mild amusement; later, realizing the dreadful fixity of Mr. Grindley's determination, her feeling changed to one of panic; the panic, in turn, eventually gave way to sheer boredom. During the autumn and winter, her strange suitor showered upon her a variety of presents, including a bunch of rather faded Michaelmas daisies, some lettuces with grubs in them, a cheap patent-leather collar for the Siamese cat, and a free pamphlet on the subject of bottling plums.

So, week after week, Mr. Grindley's dreary and uncomfortable courtship continued until an unfortunate incident in the early spring brought matters to a head. A sharp, unexpected frost cost Mr. Grindley his whole crop of gooseberries. This was a great blow to him, for things had gone badly with him of late and the crop had promised to be a heavy one, worth at least a hundred pounds.

It was in a mood of exceptionally sour temper, therefore, that he made his way to Jane's cottage to pay one of his futile visits. His temper was not improved when he perceived that the few bushes of gooseberries in Jane's front garden were completely unharmed. He paused at the front gate and stared at them. The little racemes of olive buds were as healthy and fresh as his had been yesterday. Here, thought Mr. Grindley, is surely a clear demonstration that there is no justice in the world, for whereas

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the cruel frost lays waste my valuable ten acres, this trifling patch, enough perhaps to make a gallon or so of green gooseberry wine, is miraculously spared.

No miracle, in fact, but a most curious chance had saved Jane's gooseberries. On the previous day, hanging out her Monday's washing to dry, she had pulled the clothes-line too tight, whereupon it had snapped and deposited the clean clothes in the mud. Jane swore, in a very ladylike fashion you may be certain, picked them up, washed them again, and, lacking a spare clothes-line, hung them out upon the gooseberry bushes. They had remained there all night, sheltering the young buds from the frost.

Mr. Grindley, of course, knew nothing of this. In the survival of Jane's gooseberries, he saw a miracle, and a very unfair and improper one at that. There flickered in his mean old soul the first tiny flame of resentment against Jane; and in this unpleasant frame of mind he shuffled up to the front door and knocked.

Nor was Jane's mood, as she answered the knock, a particularly sweet or welcoming one. It had been one of those days in which even for the good housewives everything goes wrong. She had burned the toast at breakfast and had spilled coffee all over the clean tablecloth. While washing up, she had experienced that misfortune which women will never credit when it happens to other women: a quite unmatchable saucer had come to pieces in her hands. The baker had forgotten to bring the bread; the butcher's boy had been rude to her; and while she had been standing at the door reproving him, some stewed prunes on the stove had stuck to the bottom of the saucepan. Furthermore, she had a nasty cold and a bad headache. Consequently, it was with no pleasure at all that she perceived the lean, depressing form of Mr. Grindley when she opened the door.

It was not because she felt any kindliness towards him, but simply because she had to sustain herself through a visit which she was sure would be insufferable, that she brought out once again the bottle of cherry wine; and when she offered him a second glass, and even a third, it was not for the purpose of cheering him up—though he looked as if he needed it—but merely to mellow him a trifle so that she might extract from him the loan of his sprayer—for the season of spraying was at hand.

As for Mr. Grindley, he drank the wine, not so much for its delicious flavour nor for the genial warmth which it engendered even in one so miserable as himself, but rather for the purpose of acquiring Dutch courage. For he had suddenly decided that the moment had come when he must declare himself. It was now or never. If only he could bring the business to a successful conclusion, winning Jane and the cherry orchard at one stroke, it would

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go far to compensate him for the loss of his gooseberry crop.

But he was certainly in need of Dutch courage. He was as tongue-tied as a sixteen-year-old; try as he would, he could not bring himself to take the plunge.

"Will you have just one more glass?" asked Jane.

He'd had three already. All the same: "If you're *quite* sure it's teetotal . . ."

Jane poured him another. Mr. Grindley shifted awkwardly. There was a long silence. At last he said: "My gooseberries, they be fair fixed by frost, like."

"Fixed" was an improvisation; nevertheless Jane knew what it meant. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Grindley," she said.

Mr. Grindley hemmed and hah'd. At last he ventured: "Yours ain't looking so bad, despite the frost."

Jane, who didn't want to confess her misfortune with the clothes-line, said mischievously: "I covered them up, you see."

"You covered them up?"

"Yes."

Mr. Grindley looked at her suspiciously.

"How did you know there was going to be a frost?" he demanded. "They didn't say so on the wireless."

In sheer desperation—she was sick to death of him; why didn't the old fool go?—Jane said: "Whenever I get a tickle behind the ears, I know it's going to freeze."

"They'd have burned you," said Mr. Grindley sombrely, "a couple of hundred years ago."

"Oh, yes," said Jane—her headache was awful, her cold was beastly, her boredom was acute, but for politeness' sake she must keep the conversation going somehow—"Didn't you know I was a witch?"

This was the moment, now or never. Mr. Grindley took a long swig at the cherry wine and suddenly plunged. He drew in his breath, collected his wits as best he could, and made the following remarkable speech:

"A witch you be for sure, Ma'am, and you have bewitched me proper these last twelve months so that I can neither eat nor sleep for thinking of you. My house up on the farm is tight and snug against wind and weather, but it's sore in need of a woman's hand. There's not much furniture, but maybe you'd bring yours along, and I know where I can buy a double bed second-hand. So let's go to church as soon as may be. 'Twas in my mind, if the frost hadn't taken my gooseberries, that we should go to the seaside for our honeymoon, but things being what they are we must be content with taking a bus ride into town to look at the shops."

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Mr. Grindley paused for breath; and then the dreadful thing happened. Jane couldn't help it; she had no intention of hurting his feelings, but her nerves were all a-tingle, the tension was unbearable, and unless she let herself go she felt as though something would snap. So Jane laughed. She exploded in a loud peal of laughter, checked herself, half succeeded in stifling it, then took another look at the dreadful, drooping figure of Mr. Grindley and burst out laughing again.

This time there was no stopping it. The laughter bubbled up inside her like ginger-pop when the stopper is out of the bottle. Perhaps the cherry wine had had something to do with this, for she had drunk no less than three glasses to keep Mr. Grindley company. She collapsed on to a chair; and still the uncontrollable laughter fizzed and frothed inside her. The expression on Mr. Grindley's face was terrible to see; it would have turned milk sour. But it could not stay Jane's laughter.

She was still laughing when Mr. Grindley, with whatever dignity he could muster, swept out. He banged the door so hard that the whole cottage shook; as he strode down the path, he slashed right and left with his stick at the gooseberry bushes; he gave the front gate such a slam that it nearly came off its hinges.

Through the window, Jane watched him go off down the road. She was very ashamed of herself and very sorry for Mr. Grindley, but she had a huge sense of relief. "That's that," she murmured to herself; and hastily fetching a dustpan and brush, she proceeded to remove the dirty marks which the creature's boots had left on her carpet.

Now we can imagine what a mixture of rage, frustration, shame and bitterness seethed in Mr. Grindley's mind. His desire for Jane was swiftly turned into hate. Even his workmen, who were accustomed to his sour looks and ill-temper, remarked upon the dreadful change in him. "Blackavis'd as the devil hisself," was how they described him.

He paid several visits to his solicitors in the neighbouring town: a long and weary walk, for he was much too mean to spend a shilling on the bus fare. He instructed them to offer two hundred pounds for Jane's orchard—about half what it was worth—but they must not mention his name; on no account must they tell her the name of their client. Jane wrote a polite refusal in her neat round hand. Mr. Grindley increased the offer by another fifty pounds. Again she refused. "Offer her three hundred!" cried Mr. Grindley in despair. For if he couldn't have Jane, he was determined to have her orchard. By hook or by crook he would have it. If it ruined him, if it took all his savings, he would

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buy it somehow. "Offer her three-fifty!" shouted Mr. Grindley, when the lawyers reported her third refusal.

For Jane had mocked him; and he could never, never forgive that. Nor could he forget those peals of laughter which still rang through his mind as he lay sleepless at night.

"I'll be revenged!" he swore to himself. But, alas! he could think of no way in which to achieve this, and his numerous attempts were singularly unsuccessful. One day he collected a boxful of assorted caterpillars, blights and other pests and, on a dark night, he pitched them over the fence into Jane's orchard; but even as he did so he was aware that the birds would probably catch them before they climbed into the trees.

He took pains to spread all manner of malicious rumours about Jane. He even alleged—you will have realized by now that Mr. Grindley was more than a little mad—that she was a witch. He half believed this himself, because of her apparent foreknowledge which had saved her gooseberries from the frost; but, of course, he was the only person who did believe it.

Jane seemed invulnerable. However, there was one way, one particularly mean little trick, which occurred to Mr. Grindley as he lay awake one night contemplating his many misfortunes and feeding his grudge. This mean little trick he put into operation the next day.

During the autumn and winter, he had built, with great labour and at some expense, a number of large bonfires around his orchards, against the danger of spring frosts. He dreaded the frosts—as indeed he might—for one sharp frost when the fruit was setting would cripple his finances for a whole year. These bonfires stood at intervals around his orchards, so that whichever way the wind was blowing the hot smoke would cover the trees.

Now he had built two such bonfires on the eastern side of Jane's cherry orchard; partly as a token of his devotion to her during his period of courtship (the bonfires cost at least ten shillings each to build), and partly as a provident precaution in case he should be the owner of the orchard, as he confidently had expected to be, before the next season came round.

He now proceeded to remove these bonfires, stick by stick, to the other side of the orchard, where they would protect his own trees, if the need arose, but not Jane's. It was a slow and laborious task which took him the better part of two days. Nevertheless, Mr. Grindley found the labour by no means uncongenial; it satisfied to some extent the malevolence which was slowly gnawing away at his mind. As he carried away each bundle of sticks, he prayed devoutly: "Please, God, let there be a frost. Let there

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be the worst frost You've ever sent us in April. Let it be eighteen degrees, oh God, if You can manage as much as that."

It can scarcely be supposed that God should have answered the prayers of Mr. Grindley; nevertheless, there *was* a frost. As Mr. Grindley sat listening to the faint whisper which came through the head-phones of his crystal-set, he caught the words: *Severe frost . . . tonight and tomorrow morning . . . most areas . . .*

Immediately, he jumped up, put on his coat and hat and a warm muffler, collected a bottle of paraffin and a box of matches, and set off to light his bonfires.

The wind was in the east, steady and keen. The clear sky was full of brittle stars. On his way, Mr. Grindley met one of his neighbours, a fruit grower named Marks.

"Good evening, Mr. Grindley."

Mr. Grindley grunted.

"Going to freeze?" asked Mr. Marks.

"Oh, I don't think so. The wireless says it'll get warmer." Mr. Grindley continued on his way.

When he reached the bonfires, he wet his finger and tested the direction of the wind. Due east. Therefore he need only light the ones on the easterly side of his orchards. To light those on the other side would be wanton waste; moreover, the smoke, blowing away from his own land, might accidentally save some of somebody else's fruit. Mr. Grindley would deplore that.

He poured the paraffin over the piles of sticks. Then he went along, lighting each heap in turn. The smoke from each blew steadily westward, blotting out the stars, blurring the crooked branches of the plum trees which fretted the pale sky. These plum trees, in the orchard nearest the road, were prize Victorias in full bearing. This orchard was his favourite one; he tended it as lovingly as Jane did her cherries. Now Mr. Grindley permitted himself to look forward to the month of July, when those crooked branches would be bent beneath their great load of purple bloom-covered plums. His neighbours' plums, on the other hand, would probably be destroyed by the frost. This reflection gave him huge satisfaction.

He glanced across the road at Jane's orchard. There the twigs, already lumpy with buds, made a frieze against the starlit sky. No kindly mantle of smoke protected them. Even now, thought Mr. Grindley, the frost's cold fingers would be caressing the little tight green buds, withering them, turning them brown . . . For the first time in his life, Mr. Grindley thanked God for the frost.

Mr. Grindley watched the bonfires merrily crackling, and even allowed himself, for a moment, to imagine Jane frizzling upon the fire. Then, in this pleasant mood, he stumped home and went to bed.

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There is a phrase—" the sleep of the just "—which describes a sleep that is supposed to be particularly profound and refreshing. This surely should have been denied to Mr. Grindley; yet in truth the wicked old man had no sooner closed his eyes and reflected for a few moments with deep satisfaction upon what he had done, than he fell into a deep and gentle slumber. Nor did any bad dreams trouble him; he slept for ten hours like an innocent child. Thus he knew nothing, until the morning, of the sudden change of the wind which backed just before midnight through north to north-west, where it settled and freshened, bringing hailstorms and, before dawn, a bitter, black frost. Mr. Grindley didn't hear the windows rattle or the wind howling like a wolf in his chimney. He slept the sleep of the unjust. He did not even snore.

Jane, on the other hand, had a bad night. Several times she dreamed that the house was on fire. There was an unaccountable smell of smoke in her bedroom. Frequently, she coughed and sneezed. As she tossed about in her feather bed, half way between sleeping and waking, she told herself she was probably catching a cold.

Once more it was high summer. Jane in her blue frock, and wearing her raffia hat, which now was decorated gaily with a chain of artificial flowers she had learned to make out of scraps of material at the Women's Institute, stood at the top of her tall ladder and filled her basket with the plump cherries. Upon other ladders her neighbours were helping her to gather in the record crop; but even with their help, and that of half a dozen chattering school-children, it was a job to clear the overburdened trees. The green-grocers in the town were crying out for Jane's cherries. Almost every other orchard in the valley had been ruined by that terrible frost.

On the other side of the road, Mr. Grindley's orchards seemed lifeless and deserted. No ladders leaned against the trees; no schoolchildren carried baskets to and fro. Not even the hungry blackbirds could find a plum on Mr. Grindley's fine Victorias. The April frost had blackened and blasted the lot, as if a veritable blitz had passed that way. Mr. Grindley was practically ruined. His land was up for sale, and he had fallen into a melancholy madness. Soon, people said, he would have to be taken away and shut up in one of those places where they looked after misers who lost their wits as soon as they lost their money.

Jane, from her treetop, glanced across the road and saw the auctioneer's poster on Mr. Grindley's gate:

Lot 5. A Desirable and Matured ORCHARD of 5a 3r 11p well-planted with Victoria plum trees in full bearing.

and she pushed her raffia hat back upon her pretty head and smiled

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her cool smile and thought that she could well afford it, she had made so much money out of her cherries this year, and really she was inordinately fond of Victoria plums. Besides, the five-acre orchard seemed to *belong* to her property somehow: it lay within her natural boundaries, it would so neatly round off her little estate. And Mr. Grindley was in such a bad way, Jane did not doubt but that she would be able to buy it cheap.

* * *

IT'S MY PROFESSION

"By the work one knows the workman," said La Fontaine . . . Allow one point for recognising the worker, one for the author, and one for the source in each case, making twenty-seven in all. Eighteen points or more merits a star for efficiency! The answers are on page 82.

1. *For this clerk—in a purely temporary capacity, and provided 'tis not in the dark!—it was indeed a sad occasion, not unconnected with an airy little case of murder.*
2. *And talking of murder, a sleuth—a sleuth who appears to have trouble with chimneys! And discovers the lethal properties of flower-pots!*
3. *Business man and Member of Parliament, and a man in search of a past—the past that lay between a wartime injury in France and a dreary park seat in Liverpool, that included the woman who was the purpose of his life.*
4. *And yet another M.P., so busy making laws to put down crime! Pity his luckless (and ringless!) victim who almost (but not quite) becomes a corpse!*
5. *Promotion came unexpectedly to this newly-wed officer of the King's Navy. No more troubles with civilian clothes, no more damned hip-baths, and Napoleon's Fleet he could take in his stride!*
6. *And as for these soldiers, mention any heroes you please, there's* none *that can compare!*
7. *Page to a duke, this attractive, though deceptive, youth. Beauty for him was not without its disadvantages, and it was plain that romance can have more than triangular complications!*
8. *She was a woman and a mother, and a mangler in a million million . . .*
9. *For a youth with ambitions at court, a vacancy for a kitchen-hand could hardly seem promising. But the gateway to romance, adventure—and a knighthood—was close at hand.*

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FLAGSTONES

"But then," he said, "I looked over my shoulder . . ."

by NORMAN EDWARDS

I RETURNED to the village after an absence of six weeks just in time to see the last of Barrow Cottage. The fire was out, but a steady stream of dirty smoke arose from the ruin, and the smell reminded me of London on a morning after a bad blitz.

Old George Jennings, the landlord of our local, nodded to me as I stopped the car and watched the villagers throwing buckets of water on the smouldering remains of what had been the oldest and prettiest cottage in the village.

" Mr. Carter all right ? " I asked. George nodded ; and just at that moment Carter loomed up out of the darkness. " Hallo, Jarrold ! " he said. " Didn't expect you back tonight."

It struck me right away that Carter was taking the loss of his cottage pretty calmly ; but I could see that he was dressed only in pyjamas and a dressing-gown ; and I could hear his teeth chattering. It was no time for condolences or fatuous chat. " You'd better jump in and come back to my place," I said. " It's freezing hard. Next thing you'll know is a dose of pneumonia."

He nodded and got into the car. " Thanks," he said. " There's nothing more I can do here. And I'd like a drink. In fact, several drinks."

Half an hour later he was sitting opposite me in front of a blazing fire, a glass of hot rum and lemon in one hand and a cigar in the other ; and my old Harris tweed fitted him well enough.

I couldn't help looking at him curiously : he'd rented the cottage only a few days before, and now the place was a heap of rubble. He'd lost his clothes, his books and, I suspected, a sizeable sum of money in rent paid in advance. And to look at him you would have got the impression that he was glad to be rid of the place.

I didn't know Carter very well. He was a member of my club in London, and I believe he was considered a very knowledgeable fellow about the theatre. One day he had asked me at the club if I knew of a country cottage to let, and it so happened that I had heard that week in our local that Barrow Cottage was in the market.

I was rather surprised, because although the owner never used

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the place—it had, in fact, been unoccupied for many years—I somehow didn't expect to hear that the cottage was to let.

Carter was very keen. He said he'd been overworking, and had been advised by his doctors to take it easy in the country for a few months, if he wanted to avoid a nervous breakdown.

Well, Carter got the cottage. And now, three days after moving in his books and furniture from his London flat, the place was a smoking ruin.

"You don't seem unduly depressed," I grinned at him, as I lit my pipe. "Hope you were insured."

"No," said Carter. "But I'm not worrying. Only too glad to be out of the dam' place."

I stared at him. "Good lord, why do you say that?" I asked. "Charming cottage. Old-fashioned, of course; but you can't expect modern amenities in a cottage built in 1592."

"It's not that," replied Carter. "I just didn't care for the place once I'd moved in."

"Why?"

Carter shrugged.

"I'll tell you if you like."

I filled his glass.

"I'd very much like to hear," I said.

"Well," said Carter slowly, "my reason for disliking the place began the night after I'd moved in. I was sitting in front of the fire, reading. The oil lamp was just behind my left shoulder, the curtains were drawn, and I was feeling as comfortable and as contented as the cat on the hearthrug. And if you can think of anything more expressive of contentment than a well-fed, middle-aged cat dozing on a rug in front of a blazing fire, your imagination is better than mine. You knew the sitting room?"

"Yes," I said. "But only when the place was empty. At one time I'd thought of buying Barrow Cottage instead of this one."

Carter nodded. "Good job you didn't," he muttered. "A jolly good job you didn't."

He stared into the fire for a while and smoked his cigar. And then suddenly he started talking again. "Stone floor," he said abruptly. "Flagstones. You remember?"

"Yes," I said. "Chilly in the winter."

He nodded. "But all right with rugs. I brought down some rather nice Persian ones I had in my flat in town. But, of course, they didn't cover all the floor. There were patches where the flagstones showed. Especially one on the right-hand side of the fireplace, and it was from underneath one of them, just by the wall, that I first heard the noise."

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Carter took a pull at his drink ; and I noticed that a rather drawn expression had come to his face. It was as if the skin on his face had been suddenly stretched. It made his high cheek-bones seem more prominent than usual.

" Noise ? " I said. " What sort of noise ? "

" A scratching noise."

" Rat ? "

" That's what I thought at the time. But it was a steady sort of scratching, unbroken in tempo. And it seemed to come from deep down—not from just under the flagstone, but from a distance. It—it gave me the impression of something burrowing. But burrowing upwards.

" Of course, the cat heard it. Hugo isn't the sort to ignore a scratching noise. In fact, he wouldn't be a cat if he did. He was up and across the room in a jiffy. How cats can *glide !* Hugo must be eight years old if he's a day, but he's got all his faculties.

" He stood on the flagstone and stared ; but his tail was up ; and by the way his ears twitched I could see he was devilish interested.

" The noise didn't falter. It was very faint that first time I heard it—faint, and as from a long way off ; but imperceptibly I was aware of the noise becoming louder and nearer.

" Hugo walked round in a circle and looked up at me. There are times when I could swear that his eyes are blue—cobalt blue, but at that moment they glowed like red lamps.

" He was getting excited. But he was also puzzled. I think he had expected to spot a mouse-hole in the wainscoting. Or smell one. But there was nothing ; nothing except that scratching noise from under the flagstone.

" I got up, moved the lamp nearer to the wall, and had a good look at the flagstone. It was a big one. About three feet square, and it fitted in with its immediate neighbours perfectly. The thing wasn't cemented into its place—if you know what I mean : it just fitted in like a stone in a mosaic.

" A well-cut, and admirably fitted flagstone. And from underneath it came that damned scratching noise.

" Hugo started to walk round in circles. His feet seemed as if they were treading on dough. You know—heavy, deliberate treading. His whiskers twitched once or twice—a sure sign with Hugo that he suspects some kind of monkey-business in the offing ; and a slight lifting of the fur on his back made it clear that he was getting annoyed.

" I suppose I stood there for at least a minute watching Hugo, and listening to that persistent scratching noise. And then suddenly I stamped heavily on the stone. I must have moved fast because I

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took Hugo unawares—and that wants some doing at the best of times. Anyway, he jumped about six inches in the air, turned on me and swore viciously, and then chucked the whole business and went back to the rug and curled up as if he thought a bad joke had gone far enough.

" Now get this clear, Jarrold : when I jumped on that flagstone I'd expected to hear a hollow sort of noise. I suspected there was a space under the stone, and that a rat was doing a spot of overtime on a rat run. But the noise of my foot stamping on the stone was dead. No suggestion of an echo.

" And the noise—the scratching noise—stopped abruptly. ' That's startled you,' I said aloud, thinking that the rat, or mouse, or whatever it was, must have had a hell of a fright.

" I waited a while to see if the noise would start up again, and then I went back to my armchair, poked the fire, and picked up my book. I happened to be reading Dover Wilson's *What Happens in Hamlet* for about the tenth time.

" And—a coincidence, this !—I had come to Wilson's analysis of the Cellarage Scene, where Hamlet addresses the ghost of his father in the cellar as if it were a devil.

" You remember ? He calls it ' boy ' and ' truepenny ' and ' old mole.' And then Wilson goes on to say that the noises and rumblings that spirits and devils were supposed to make in the bowels of the earth is a point to which old writers return again and again ; and he leads up to a very clever explanation of Hamlet's words :

> *' Well said, old mole ! Canst work i' th' earth so fast ?*
> *A worthy pioneer ! '*

" And damn it all, Jarrold, if at that very moment the scratching noise didn't start up again. But louder."

I laughed. I couldn't help it ; for I could easily imagine the effect of reading about the Cellarage Scene in *Hamlet* and then actually hearing that noise again.

But Carter was not amused. He looked, in fact, rather annoyed. " It's all very well for you to laugh," he muttered, " but if you'd been there you wouldn't have been inclined to treat the thing as a joke."

I wiped the grin off my face and nodded. " I dare say you're right," I said. " But go on. What did you do ? Get a crowbar and prise up the flagstone ? "

" I did not," said Carter shortly. " I turned out the lamp and went to bed—but I *did* make up my mind before I went to sleep to have that flagstone up in the morning.

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" However, after I'd had breakfast the next morning I decided not to bother. Instead, I went down to the village and bought a rat-trap, baited it with cheese, and then went for a long walk. I lunched at a pub and didn't get back to the cottage until tea-time. Mrs. Yates—she ' does for me ' as they say—had left everything shipshape, but as she always cleared off after lunch I had to get tea for myself.

" I had it in front of the fire. The rat-trap was empty, but I didn't expect to find a tenant. I thought the rat wouldn't come out of its run until I'd gone to bed.

" After tea I made a search of the room to see if I could find a hole anywhere. Hugo kept me company and he seemed extremely interested. But no sign of a hole could I find.

" Well, I settled down with my book after supper—about nine o'clock—and read quietly for a couple of hours. Not a sound. The fire was going well ; Hugo was sound asleep ; and at about eleven o'clock I thought I'd have a nightcap and turn in. And just as I put my book down the noise started again."

" Same sort of noise ? " I asked.

" Yes," said Carter, giving me an odd sort of look. " Only much louder—and much nearer."

" Do you mean," I asked, " as if the rat had burrowed closer to the flagstone ? "

" Much closer," said Carter shortly.

" What did you do, Carter ? "

" What *could* I do, at that time of night ? But I made up my mind to shift that stone next morning and find out what the devil it was that made all that noise.

" I suppose I sat there, listening, for at least five minutes. Of course, Hugo woke up and trotted over and stood by the stone. But he didn't like it. He listened, looked at me, and I think he wondered —cats can wonder, you know—if I was responsible. There was a glint in his eyes.

" But I think he knew that I was just as puzzled as he was, for he hissed and swore a bit at the stone and then suddenly streaked across the room and sat by the door. That surprised me. It was the first time I'd known Hugo to get the wind up."

" The wind up," I echoed. " Do you mean—"

" I mean," interrupted Carter, " that Hugo was scared. He sat there by the door and looked distinctly windy. I went over to him and made reassuring noises. But he wasn't having any. There was a look on his face that made me feel it would be unwise to pick him up and pet him : Hugo has unpleasantly sharp claws. So I called him a yellow belly, and a few other insulting things, and opened the door for him.

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" He went out as fast as light. I last saw him haring along the passage that led to the kitchen—and a small window I leave open for him, in case he wants to use the garden during the night."

Carter puffed at his cigar.

" I wonder where he is now," he murmured.

" Never mind Hugo," I said. " What about the rat ? "

" When I shut the door after Hugo," went on Carter, " I sat down again and listened. I was trying to guess what sort of animal it was that was making that noise. You see, Jarrold, the thing—whatever it was—had evidently done a spot of busy burrowing, for I got the impression that it was not more than a couple of feet away from the stone. And judging by the row it was making, it was an outsize in rats. If it was a rat.

" Well, I suppose I sat there for a good five minutes, just listening. But suddenly I felt furious. I jumped up and stamped with both feet on the stone and swore loudly. ' Get out,' I shouted. ' Get to hell out of it.' "

Carter swallowed some rum ; and I saw that his hand was shaking. He looked queer. I wondered if I was going to have a sick man on my hands. I thought it likely that he'd caught a bad chill, hanging about in the cold clad only in pyjamas and a dressing-gown. I wanted to persuade him to get off to bed, but he started talking again.

" I felt a bit of a fool," he said, " going off the deep end like that. I sat down in my chair and made up my mind to ignore the noise if it started again.

" And then it happened—"

" What," I exclaimed. " The noise ? Again ? "

" No. I heard a giggle."

" A *what* ? "

" A giggle," repeated Carter. " At least that was what it sounded like to me."

" Rubbish ! " I said. " A rat can't giggle."

" I know," said Carter.

" Look here," I went on—more gently, this time, because I had the idea that perhaps Carter was going to have a nervous breakdown after all—" look here, why do you use a word like ' giggle ' to describe the sound you heard ? "

" Because," said Carter, " the word exactly describes what I heard."

" You don't mean *gurgle*," I suggested, " because I have an idea—"

" I don't mean gurgle," said Carter. " I mean giggle. A high-pitched giggle."

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" Couldn't it have been a water pipe ? " I suggested. " They sometimes make very odd noises."

" No water laid on," said Carter. " And I tell you, I sat there and heard—something—make a giggling noise. From underneath the flagstone.

" I couldn't believe my ears. I didn't believe my ears. Until I heard the giggle again. Quite clearly. And then the scratching noise began again."

Carter was white. He looked ill. Frighteningly ill. But before I could say another word he started talking again—fast, this time.

" I don't know why," he said, " but I suddenly felt as Hugo did. I wanted to get out of that room. I felt—yes, I admit it—I felt scared. Badly scared. Because, you see, as I stared at the flagstone I was certain it moved.

" I jumped up out of the chair and pushed it back. Over went the lamp. A devil of a crash. The oil ran all over the rug and on to the flagstone. The rug caught fire. I jumped clear all right and naturally tried to shift the rug. But it blazed up so quickly that I had to drop it. The fire gulped the old oak in the walls. I ran for the door."

Carter wiped a hand over his forehead ; and then he coughed once or twice as if he found it difficult to draw breath. " But," he muttered after a few seconds of stertorous breathing, " as I got to the door, I looked over my shoulder—back at the flagstone. I distinctly saw the flagstone lift up. It moved suddenly, as if—as if—something had made a great effort . . . And then I saw, groping up from under the stone—"

Carter abruptly stood up. With both hands he began plucking at the scarf he had wound round his throat. He swayed on his feet ; and I was only just in time to catch him as he fell fainting into my arms.

Somehow I dragged him to the sofa and got him stretched out. I got smelling salts, and brandy, but neither did any good. He lay rigid.

I went to the telephone and called up Dr. Mason.

Mason may be old, but he is efficient. He came round to my cottage within fifteen minutes. He made a quick examination of Carter, and then telephoned for an ambulance. Within half an hour Carter was in the local hospital.

Carter died that evening.

" And don't ask me what he died of," growled old Mason when I saw him next morning, " because I don't know."

" Poor devil," I said—inadequately enough. " I expect exposure was the start of the trouble. He was hanging about in pyjamas and a

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dressing-gown while the lads were trying to cope with the fire. Did he tell you about it ? "

" He was unconscious when he died," answered old Mason.

" Didn't say anything at all ? "

" Not a word," said Mason. " I thought he was coming round just at the end. He opened his eyes for a moment, and his lips moved, but he didn't speak. It was really rather—rather horrible because—"

" Because ? " I repeated.

" Because he just giggled," said Dr. Mason.

* * *

DEVOTION

There is no sickness so woeful as secret love ; och, long have I thought it ! I shall refrain from declaring it no longer, my secret love for my slender gentle girl.

I have given love that I cannot hide to her curling hair, to her solemn mind, to her narrow eyebrow, to her blue-grey eye, to her even teeth, to her soft face.

I have given also, though I admit it, the love of my life to her smooth throat, to her melodious voice, to her sweet-tasting lips, to her snowy bosom, to her pointed breast.

Och, my grief ! I cannot forget my melancholy love for her white body, for her straight smooth foot, for her narrow sole, for her slow smile, for her soft hand.

Though there has not been known before devotion like mine to her beyond all, there is not, there will not be, and there has not been a woman who more cruelly stole my love.

Author unknown, 16th Century,
translated from the Irish by
KENNETH HURLSTONE JACKSON

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TIGER GENERAL

There was a great silence while Szu-ma stopped, looked—and saw

by LESLIE BONNET

IN the year 210 A.D. black-bearded Ma Shu, one of the five Tiger Generals of the Kingdom of Shu, feasted heavily in the city of Chieh-t'ing. Outside it were encamped the inferior forces of the invading General Szu-ma.

In the long low hall where General Ma entertained his guests there was light and much noise. The violins and the flutes, the drums, the gongs and the cymbals confused but could not drown the shouted toasts, the loud boastings.

There came, edging through the throng, until he stood bowing beside General Ma, a messenger, horse whip still in hand. He bore an order from the Sovereign. Chieh-t'ing, that strategic point in the defence of the kingdom of Shu, must be relieved of enemy pressure. The invading General Szu must be attacked, defeated.

In Chinese military operations, where forces often campaigned at great distances from the seat of government, there were two kinds of orders which were sent from the head of state to commanders in the field. One was an order. Ma had had several such. The other was an "order which must be obeyed." Ma held one now in his long fingers.

Ma stroked his black beard, silenced the orchestra, and withdrew with his captains to ponder this new situation.

All night long, light shone from the *yamen* where the general conferred. And all night long from the nearer hillsides outside the city wall winked and flared the camp fires of the invaders. Sudden trumpet-horns brayed, the beat of gongs jarred across the night.

In the half-light of early morning General Ma arrayed his army on the plain outside the western gate. He rode slowly along the ranks, glorious in dragon-embroidered panoply, the four message flags mounted behind his shoulders, his enormous halberd-like lance in his hand. The morning breeze, sporting with his beard, revealed the death-repelling mirror on his breast.

The banners waved, the war-gongs were beaten, the men, with well-drilled precision, uttered a fearful shout. From the opposing hillside came no answering clamour, no banners waved, no gongs

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sounded. Only a wisp of dust hanging over one mountain defile showed, as daylight flooded the plain, that General Szu had gone.

General Ma might well have considered his immediate task accomplished. He did indeed play with the thought of reporting that the royal order had been carried out.

But the general, although a master of military tactics had not in fact, during the long course of his rise to the high estate of Tiger General, ever had the felicity of meeting an enemy in actual combat. And now, with retreating inferior forces before him, combined with the slight irritation of temper which a disturbed night had engendered, the temptation to crown an honoured career with an historic victory was strong indeed.

Ma ordered an advance. The army slowly wound across the plain and on to the foothills. The general and his staff followed at such a distance as to avoid the choking dust raised by the troops.

All that day the tiresome advance continued. All that day from distant heights, from farther valleys, the beat of a drum, the flirt of a banner, the momentary glint of sunlight on vanishing spear heads lured the forces of the Tiger General further and further still, away from Chieh-t'ing.

Late afternoon found the army stumbling over boulders, wading through marshes ; threading a painful way through mountains that pressed closer and stood steeper as it progressed.

General Ma was disquieted. He knew the old strategic warning against manœuvring in " entangling ground." He knew, too, the ancient maxim, " Put oneself in a desperate situation to obtain salvation." The embarrassing sounds of enemy forces were less distant now, more encircling.

Above Ma, on one side, the great mountain Bien Shan towered steeply, its edges precipitous, the summit serene, remote. Ma stopped and regarded it.

He sent for one of his captains. " Take two stout fellows," he said, " and fetch me quickly a man of this region."

A man was brought, an uncouth farming fellow of no consequence.

" Beat him soundly," Ma told his attendants, " that I may enquire of him if there be any path up this mountain."

After a thorough beating the fellow readily admitted that there was one way to the summit of Bien Shan ; but only one way.

General Ma made the necessary arrangements for his forces and himself to be led up forthwith. " For," thought the General, " if there be only one way of approach the mountain will be easy to defend."

Some thousands of armed men, then, grunted and groaned their way to the top of Bien Shan in the fading light. And as they climbed

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they heard from below them the cheerful sounds of General Szu's men encamping, and saw, as they stopped for breath, the lights of many fires.

It is a feature common to mountain tops that they lack fuel, food and water. And it can be readily understood of military positions that the more difficult they are to get into the more difficult they are get out of.

For these reasons no more need be said of General Ma and his many thousand armed men, of the banners and war gongs and horses that went with them out of Chieh-t'ing that morning. Nor need any more be said of Chieh-t'ing, that strategic city, which they went out to defend. For General Ma and his captains and his men it was as if they had not been. And of all in Chieh-t'ing there was, it can be said, nothing left after six days had passed. Tiger and vulture, fire and worm had finished what the sword had begun.

In the meantime we must consider the plight of the neighbouring city which was guarded by the Commander-in-chief of all the Shu forces; but without any adequate garrison.

The name of this Commander-in-chief was Chu-kê Liang.

Chu-kê Liang had, of course, received intelligence of the disaster which had befallen General Ma and of the fate of the city he had set out to defend. He could not fail to appreciate that the capture of Chieh-t'ing left the kingdom of Shu uncovered to the invader. And he had had time to reflect that the poor city in which he sat lay right in the path of the ever victorious General Szu-ma.

Chu-kê was not therefore unduly taken aback by the event which occurred early in the morning of the seventh day after Ma's defeat. When a servant had brought to him a parcel which had been left on the threshold of his dwelling overnight, he had been for a moment pleasantly excited. But as the parcel was being unwrapped a provisional guess at its contents was possible. It was indeed so. The parcel contained the head of General Ma, not in very good condition it is admitted; but authentic. The head rolled back and forth for a moment where the servant had dropped it, the features shrunken into an expression of utter astonishment.

Chu-kê knew the meaning of the message. General Szu-ma must already be close to the city. Today he would enter.

Chu-kê did not waste time regretting the reason for his lack of armed men. Only five days before he had sent one of his generals south with all his effective forces to deal with a small provincial insurrection. Indeed the total armed forces left in the city were four fearless but aged soldiers. He knew that the expedition had been successful, and he had had messages telling of the return of his army within two days.

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But two days was nearly forty hours away. And General Szu-ma was perhaps distant only two hours. Two fleeting hours. And at the end of that short time the van of the army of General Szu-ma had indeed halted at these city gates.

The road which led to the city wound across a low plain. Just below it on either side were the rice fields, now at this season awash, so that square ponds with earthen banks stretched as far as eye could reach.

In the forenoon, from the city, over where the road was lost in distance, had been seen a great cloud of dust. It hung in the air, drifted heavily over the land, hung and moved forward. Presently in the darkness under the dust cloud had been seen the glint of steel, and a low rumble of feet and hooves and voices that came and went.

The clamour had grown louder until the leading troops could be seen. They were bowmen and men with sharp darts. And there marched with them men armed with long-handled hooks with which riders might be dragged from their horses.

Now these men had marched up near to the city gates. And there they stopped. And there was a great silence. And their captain rode forward and looked and saw and, curtly bidding his men stay, rode savagely to the rear.

And so matters stood for one long hour. The city, quiet, helpless, crouched before the army that did not pounce.

At the end of that time the captain came back. He was attending General Szu-ma himself.

The General sat his horse a few hundred yards from the gate. By his side hung the two great clubs with which he fought. His hair was as red as fire, his face very dark. On the skirt of his gown a golden tiger writhed.

General Szu-ma looked and saw.

He saw the city gates wide open, and through them he saw a quiet deserted street. Between him and the gate four old soldiers calmly swept the roadway as if to honour his entry. And over the gateway on a long stool sat General Chu-kê Liang, the defender of the city, playing soft welcoming music on a moon guitar.

As General Szu-ma watched him, a servant brought Chu-kê wine in silver bowls and Chu-kê stopped to drink, with a proper reverence towards Szu-ma, and then resumed his playing again.

And General Szu-ma looked and there seemed to be something impish in the fawning attitude of the old sweepers. And he looked and there was something very sinister in the bland preoccupation of his enemy. And he saw that the silent city and the empty streets could only mean a trap. The silence was an enforced hush, the emptiness was the concealment of strength.

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And General Szu-ma ordered the retreat. And having done so he stood in his stirrups and reviled General Chu-kê Liang.

" You thing ! " he roared. " You thing that are nothing. You worthless one! Did you suppose that this person would be deceived? You must think you fight with children to use such patent stratagems."

The four old men swept on, unmoved. General Chu-kê Liang continued blandly to play.

" Son of a donkey ! " A sip of wine.

" Your mother must have been a turtle ! " A pleasing twang from the guitar.

Szu-ma turned and went, still yelling insults.

General Szu-ma went, he and his army, back towards the west. And even as they went the moon guitar player's returning troops were coming up from the south. They would be in the city by nightfall.

The threatening dust cloud began to retreat across the plain. The old men leaned on their brooms, grinning. Chu-kê Liang steadfastly kept on playing and drinking.

But it must be told that as the tension relaxed he played a little less, and drank a little more.

* * *

THIS ATOM . . .

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,
And now a bubble bursts, and now a world.

ALEXANDER POPE

Nearly fifty songs about atomic energy have now been copyrighted in the U.S.A., including Atom Bounce, Atom Boogie, and Up and At 'Em With Our Atom. But songs about love still lead. *Evening Standard*

Man . . . like an angry ape
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep . . . SHAKESPEARE

Finally, like the sorcerer's apprentice, we may practise our magic without knowing how to stop it, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Prospero. In view of our behaviour recently, I cannot pretend to deprecate such a possibility; but I think it is worth mentioning. BERNARD SHAW

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TIDEWAYS

Of sea towns and storm-lashed shores, and the dreaming tiger sighing in the sun

It was more than a wind, it was a gale. As it came up the Channel against them, it taunted the leaden waves into showing their white crests, swept over the short turf, darkened the asphalt of the esplanade with salt moisture, bleared the glass of the "shelters," bellied out mackintoshes, blew over children's hoops, frizzed damped permanent curls and curled natural ones; carried off here a beret, there a newspaper, intoxicated a red kite, rattled windows, banged doors, scooped litter out of litter baskets, lifted pram covers, whirred bright celluloid windmills, while the gulls driven before it, wheeled and swooped above the sea and pier and sands and town, their crying making a shrill sad counterpoint to the wind's own tearing velvety roar . . .

SYLVIA THOMPSON, *The People Opposite*

From The Beach at Midnight

The moon reached out her cold hand
and stroked the wet scaly head of the sea
until it was still
and slept.

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH

The Dreaming Tiger

From Sori I moved on down the Riviera to a little fishing village which is the gem of the whole coast from Savona to Spezia . . . It is a functional fishing village, not a tourist resort. It is so crushed down to the seashore by the hills that its houses have had to be built to an unusual height to contain all its inhabitants. As they rise up, one behind another, on the steep hill, the whole village looks from the sea like a cluster of skyscrapers that glow in the sun like palaces carved from coral. In these tenements families are piled on the top of families in crowded warrens which are entered under dim arches that lead to steep stone stairs . . . Down along the shingled beach, and between the beach and the tiny cluttered harbour, there are more crooked houses on every square foot of crooked space . . . with taverns built over the water, a ruined castle to top the rocks, and a gaudy, glittering, golden church approached by a flight of noble steps.

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I have never seen a place with so vibrant a personality. I loved it because it is a place where there is an intense local life. The very name of the village throbs with emotion: Camogli . . . the Wives' House, or Home, in reference to all the wives who have been widowed by the sea. You feel this bond immediately you climb the steps from the quays, which gleam with fish-scales and smell of petrol, into the church which gleams with gold and smells of incense and wax . . .

As I knelt there in the half-light and silence I became aware that the silence was not absolute. There was a soft weeping sound, a gentle groaning sound, falling rhythmically to a whisper as of wings in the air. I looked at the altar, shaped gracefully like a boat, and gradually I realized that this gentle and regular throb came from behind the apse. It was the sea pulsing eternally on the shingle below. That muttering of water pervades Camogli. Children are born to its rocking, sleep to it, live on it, age on it, and too often sink into it. Around the walls of the church are several lovely *ex voto* models of sailing ships—lost and saved—and black obituary photographs. I see again, with special vividness, the face of the jovial, fat, moustached sea-captain in the jaunty straw hat smiling down at me; while that old siren outside, beyond his shadow that is a light, the blue, placid and seemingly innocent sea, sighs like a dreaming tiger . . .

SEAN O'FAOLAIN, *A Summer in Italy*

Ocean Townships

They never lose longing for the never-known,
These ocean-townships moored and hawsered fast,
They welcome ships, salt-jewelled venturers
That up over the curve of the world are blown
With sun-rise in their sails and gold-topped mast . . .

JOSEPHINE PINCKNEY

Sailor Ashore

In the nights, in the winter nights, in the nights of storm when the wind howls, it is then that I feel the sweet of it. Aha, I say, you howling catamount, I say, you may blow, wind, and crack your cheeks for all I care. Then I listen to the noise of the elm trees and to the creak in the old floorings, and, aha, I say, you whining rantipoles, you may crack and you may creak, but here I shall lie till daylight.

JOHN MASEFIELD, *A Tarpaulin Muster*

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Evening Ebb

The sun has gone down, and the water has gone down
From the weed-clad rock, but the distant cloud-wall rises.
The ebb whispers.
Great cloud-shadows float in the opal water.
Through rifts in the screen of the world pale gold gleams,
and the evening
Star suddenly glides like a flying torch,
As if we had not been meant to see her ; rehearsing behind
The screen of the world for another audience.

ROBINSON JEFFERS

Into Port

The day was perfect, the sunlight clear and strong. Every particle of water thrown into the air became a gem, and the *Spray*, as she bounded ahead, snatched necklace after necklace from the sea, and as often threw them away . . .

I made for the cove . . . The bay was feather-white as my little vessel tore in, smothered in foam. It was my first experience of coming into port alone, with a craft of any size, and in among shipping. Old fishermen ran down to the wharf for which the *Spray* was heading, apparently intent upon braining herself there. I hardly know how a calamity was averted, but with my heart in my mouth, almost, I let go the wheel, stepped quickly forward, and downed the jib. The sloop naturally rounded in the wind, and just ranging ahead, laid her cheek against a mooring-pile at the windward corner of the wharf, so quietly, after all, that she would not have broken an egg. Very leisurely I passed a rope around the post, and she was moored. Then a cheer went up from the little crowd on the wharf . . .

JOSHUA SLOCUM, *Sailing Alone Around the World*

The Sea and The Skylark

On ear and ear two noises too old to end
Trench—right, the tide that ramps against the shore ;
With a flood or a fall, low lull-off or all roar,
Frequenting there while moon shall wear and wend.

Left hand, off land, I hear the lark ascend,
His rash-fresh re-winded new-skeined score
In crisps of curl off wild winch whirl, and pour
And pelt music, till none's to spill nor spend . . .

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, 1844-1889

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THE GOOSE GIRL

Perhaps I had no right to be so happy

by ERIC LINKLATER

WHEN I woke among the currant bushes I saw her coming out of the cottage door with her fist round the gander's neck. I heard them, too, for she was yelling and the gander was beating the doorposts and beating her thighs with his great creaking wings. Like a windmill in the distance, like the slap of a rising swan's black feet on the water, like clothes on the line thrashing in a breeze: the gander was making nearly as much noise as she was, and she was shouting her head off.

There was no leaping tune in her voice that morning. It was just the air in her lungs being driven through the funnel of her throat like steam from a well-fired boiler; and some of the words she was using were no prettier than what goes on in any stoker's mind. But I wasn't listening so much as looking. I had heard those words before, but I had never seen a woman's body like hers, so firm and long of limb, like a young reed in firmness and round as an apple where it should be, and white as a pearl. Against the gander's wings, which were a cold white like snow, her pallor was warm and glowing. Not reflecting light, but glowing with it. She was naked as the sky, and the sky, at four o'clock in the morning, was bare of cloud except for a little twist of wool low down in the west.

Now she gripped the gander's neck with both her hands, and even her hands weren't red like any other country girl's, but small and white. They were strong though, and I could see the hardness of her forearms. She was throttling the bird, and its beak was wide open, a gaping stretch of yellow skin, the upper mandible at right-angles to the lower. Its eyes were hidden in the ruffling of its little head-feathers. She dragged it through the door, gave a great heave, and threw it with a noise of breaking stalks into some overgrown rhubarb. A splash of dew-drops rose from the leaves and caught the light.

For a moment she stood looking at the bird, her arms a little bent and her hair dishevelled, her mouth open, and her breast rising and falling. Then, abruptly, she turned and went back into the cottage, slamming the door behind her. I listened, I remember, for

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the sound of a key turning or a bolt going home; but in this part of the country they never lock their doors. It was lack of custom, not lack of feeling, that prevented her from giving this final emphasis to her act of expulsion.

The gander shook himself, hissing loudly, and broke more stalks of rhubarb as he made his way to a narrow path of little sea-shore pebbles. I had seen him before, half a dozen times with the girl, and always marvelled at the size of him, but now, from where I lay among the currant bushes, he looked bigger than ever and his ruffled head-feathers stood out like a crown. His neck was as stiff as a broom handle but twice as thick, and he turned his head this way and that with a twitch of the bill, an angry snap. His little black eyes were swollen and bright, and the broad webs of his feet fell on the path with the heavy tread of German infantry.

He stopped when he saw me and stood for a little while, hissing like a burst tyre; but not in the way of an ordinary gander, with its neck low to the ground and its beak reaching forward. He stood upright, his head swaying back as if to look at me from a greater height, and when he had done with hissing he turned his back on me and went tramping through some rows of cabbage plants to a gap in the low garden wall where the old turf-dyke on which it was built had collapsed and brought down the stone.

It was a plain little garden with no colour in it except some yellow daisies under the cottage windows and a thin growth of honeysuckle beside the door. There was a fuchsia hedge on one side, not in flower yet, and gooseberries and black-currant bushes along the other walls, with a clump of grey-barked elder-trees in the corner. On one side of the dividing pebble path rhubarb and spring onions, early potatoes and cabbage on the other: that was all. And the gander, marching like a Prussian, flattened the cabbages under his broad splayed feet as if there had been the weight of a man in him. Perhaps there was. He was no ordinary bird, that was certain.

I got up and followed him, cautiously, as he disappeared, and watched him swimming down the little stream that runs behind the cottage to the big loch a quarter of a mile away. I saw his head, still ruffled, still indignantly twitching, behind a bank of meadowsweet; and then he vanished.

I leant against the wall of a cartshed, thinking. The air was still, and the country looked as though no one had ever touched it. The day before had been wet and ugly, and I remembered with a kind of shame how unhappy I had been; and how clumsily I had behaved, getting drunk so that I could tell the truth. But now I felt uncommonly well—and I had done my duty. There's nothing like sleeping in the open air to prevent a hangover, and I had, after long delay, disburdened my mind. The evening before I had gone to see

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John Norquoy to tell him how his young brother had been killed on the shore of Lake Comacchio.

We had been together for a long time, Jim Norquoy and I, in the Seaforths to begin with and then in the Commando, and between Primo Sole in Sicily and that great cold lagoon of Comacchio, mud and water and a dancing mirage, we had had our fill of fighting. Jim was hit in shallow water, wading ashore after our boats had grounded on a mudbank just as the sun came up, and I carried him in. But he died on the edge of the land, and his last words were, " You'll find it difficult to go back too, after all this."

That was an understatement. I found it impossible to go back to the life I had known before, and when I came north to the islands, to tell his people about Jim and give him what immortality I could, by feeding their pride in him, I was looking for something for myself as well. No more school-teaching for me. I was never meant to be a teacher anyway, either by Providence or my parents. I had only wanted to live—I mean to live in such a way that life came in through my eyes and I could feel it on my skin—but never had I known how to go about it till the war came. And now, when the war was over, I was more at a loss than ever. I couldn't go back to an elementary school in Falkirk, and teach little boys the parts of speech and the more blatant pieces of history, for fear that one of them, some day, might ask me, " What's it all for ? What are we going to say when we've learnt the parts of speech ; and if we learn all the history in the world, what would it mean ? "

I was no coward, not in the physical sense, and I had been a good soldier—not as good as Jim, though I earned my pay—but when I looked at those questions in the solitude of my mind I knew that I couldn't face them in public. Nor did I want to. I wanted to live, but not to set myself up as a preceptor of living.

Now, after six years in the Army, I felt that I had served my apprenticeship to war, but I was still a novice in peace. I hadn't much to guide me except negatives. I didn't want to live in a town, for one thing, because I felt, at that time, the need to think ; and peace to think, in my view of it, required the open sky.

I started badly, for after I had seen John Norquoy at a cattle market one day, I couldn't bring myself to go and tell him about Jim. I had wanted to make him, and all his friends, so proud of Jim that he would live for ever in their minds like a lighted lamp, to which their love would be as moths, gathering to his memory and beating its wings in the glow of him. Jim was my friend, and even the Seaforth Highlanders had never known a better man.

But when I first saw John Norquoy I realized that it wasn't going to be easy to talk about pride to him, for he knew enough already.

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That was evident, though it was quite an ordinary occasion. He was looking at a thin-faced cattle-dealer pulling the loose black skin on the rump of a two-year-old heifer. There was nothing of the braggart in him, nothing loud or boastful, but he had the same build as Jim, the same sort of head ten years older, the look of a man who knew what he was after and what it was worth. There was nothing I could tell John Norquoy about pride, and when I realized that I put off going to see him. I put it off for about three weeks.

I stayed with the village schoolmaster, a good man who had fought in the last war. I told him about my other difficulty, and he thought I could teach with safety in a country school. "The children here," he said, "wouldn't worry you with awkward questions. They don't grow up with doubt in their minds. Life for them means birth and marriage and death, and they're all natural things. It means hard work and hard weather, and what amusement they and their neighbours can make for themselves. It means dancing and making love when they're young, and breeding a good beast and gossiping when they're older."

But I didn't want to teach, either in country or town, so I spent my three weeks in idleness, but kept my eyes open. I had an open mind too, and no accomplishments. I was ready for suggestions; but not for going to see John Norquoy.

I met Lydia one day, and talked to her for a quarter of an hour till her mother came out and called her in. The next time I saw her she had the gander with her, and she wasn't so friendly. I felt hurt and disappointed and a little angry, though I didn't realize then what she was really like. We pay too much attention to clothes, and hers were the sort you don't see in a town unless a strayed gipsy has come in. She had a small, beautifully shaped head, but her hair was tangled by the wind and greasy, and her features were so regular that I didn't notice, to begin with, how good they were. Her throat was lovely, long and as white as milk, but her neck was dirty, and when I saw her for the second time it was the same dirt, I'm fairly sure, that still darkened her skin. And yet I felt hurt when she wouldn't stay and talk to me.

I asked the schoolmaster about her, and he told me she was illegitimate, a state of being that's not extraordinary in country districts. Her mother was a grim old woman named Thomasina Manson, a crofter's only child, unpopular as a girl, who had lived a lonely and blameless life till she was about thirty-five, when she had gone to Edinburgh, and what she did there, except get herself into trouble, no one ever knew. It was generally supposed that she had been in domestic service, and when her baby was born, about three months after she came home, she told the doctor that its father came of the gentry. But that's all she told, and her father and mother,

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who had married late in life, never recovered from the shock. They died, one after the other, within a couple of years of Lydia's birth, and Thomasina was left alone to work the croft and bring up the child.

I waited another ten days, and then, one Saturday morning, I went to town—four thousand inhabitants and a little red cathedral—and managed to get a bottle of whisky. I arrived at the Norquoys' about six o'clock, and though I hadn't told them I was coming, they seemed to be expecting me. News travels quickly here, and even a man's intentions become public property as soon as he has realized them himself, and sometimes before. So I sat down to a mighty farmhouse tea in the kitchen, and no one said a word about Jim. They asked me what I thought of the islands, and where I belonged to, and if my parents were still alive, and they all laughed when I mistook a young sister of John Norquoy's wife for one of his daughters.

After tea John Norquoy took me out to see the animals. He had a couple of fine young Clydesdales, a small herd of black-polled cattle, a great surly white boar, and a few score of sheep on hill pasture. We walked in his fields for a couple of hours, and still no word of Jim. But when we came back to the farm he led me into the ben-room; a peat fire had been lighted in it, and going through the passage where I had hung my waterproof I took my bottle out of the pocket. Norquoy paid no attention to it when I set it down, but went to a little table in the window where another bottle, the same brand as my own, stood on a tray with glasses and a jug of water. He poured a couple of deep drams and said, " It was very good of you to write about Jim in the way you did. We're most grateful to you, and we're glad to see you here. If you're thinking of staying, there's a bed for you whenever you want it."

I took my drink before I answered, and then, slowly and little by little, I told him about Jim, and about the war, and what it means to go through five or six battles with the same friend beside you, and then to lose him in the last one. I realized, in an hour or two, that I was playing the bereaved brother myself, but I couldn't help it by then. Mrs. Norquoy came in, and their eldest boy, and her sister that I had taken for Norquoy's daughter, and then two or three neighbours.

I went on talking, and they listened. I got most of the load off my mind, and if they didn't realize, by the end of it all, that Jim had been a soldier, well it wasn't my fault. And every word I spoke was the simple truth. But when I got up to go Mrs. Norquoy said, " We're peaceful folk here, Mr. Tyndall, and Jim was one of us. How he endured all that fighting I just can't understand." It wasn't till a

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few days later, when I remembered her words, that I began to realize how much they had disliked what I had been telling them. They were peaceful folk, and they didn't approve of war.

But at the time I wasn't in the mood to catch a fine shade of meaning. Both bottles were empty, and I had had a lot more than my share. John Norquoy drank moderately and showed no sign of having drunk at all. I was the only one who seemed to have taken any benefit from what we had been doing, and Norquoy insisted on coming with me as far as the main road. I was walking well enough, but talking too much by then, and I told him—without difficulty—what I had been waiting for the strength to tell. I got rid of the guilt on my mind.

For a black minute or two, splashing through the shallows of Comacchio, I had been glad when Jim was killed. Glad it was he and not I whom death had taken, for we knew, both of us, that our luck was too good to last, and one or the other must go before the end. And when I saw it was Jim I was glad, and the guilt of it had lain on me ever since. Norquoy said nothing that I can remember, though I think he tried to comfort me and I know that he wanted to take me home. But I wouldn't let him.

Soon after we had said good night it came into my head that I would like to take a look at the goose girl's house. Lydia's, I mean. The last time I had seen her she had been driving her whole flock, fifteen or sixteen of them with the great gander in front like a drum-major, past a big shallow pool in the stream, where the cattle came to drink, and the whole procession had been reflected in the calm water as if to make a picture. And that night I dreamt of her, and in my dream she was trying to tell me something, but I couldn't hear her.

So I turned off the main road towards her mother's house, and before I got there I realized how drunk I was. I'm not trying to excuse myself, but the whisky had been mixed with a lot of emotion, and as the result of one coming in and the other going out my knees were beginning to buckle, and when I came to the cottage I had one hunger only, and that was for sleep. There was a south-easterly breeze blowing, chill in the middle of the night, and to get into shelter I clambered over the garden wall, and the softness of the dug soil on the other side seemed very comfortable. I fell asleep under the currant bushes, and what woke me was Lydia's screaming and the clattering of the gander's wings as she threw it out of the house.

Well, after I'd seen the bird go marching off, and disappear downstream, I went round, as I said before, to the lee-side of the cartshed and smoked a cigarette. I had been lying on the packet and

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they were pretty flat, but I rolled one into shape again, and while I smoked I thought, and came to a conclusion.

I fingered my chin, and it was smooth enough. I had shaved about five o'clock the afternoon before. I felt fresh and well. Sleeping on the ground had done me no harm, for I had grown used to that, and the night had been mild. My clothes were damp with dew and soiled with earth, but I took off my coat and shook it, and cleaned myself fairly well with some cut grass. Then I went down to the stream, and kneeling on the bank I washed my face and rinsed my mouth, and drank a few handfuls of water.

The door, the unlocked door, opened easily enough and I made no noise going in. I stood in a little passage with some old coats hanging on the opposite wall, and an uncarpeted wooden stair before me that led to a loft. To the right there was a door into the kitchen, where the old woman slept in a box-bed, and to the left was the ben-room with a closet on the inner side where Lydia slept. The ben-room door was closed with a latch, or a sneck, as they call it here, and my hand was steady. I opened the door without a sound, but only two or three inches, and looked in.

Lydia had put on a long white nightgown, an old-fashioned garment with coarse lace at the neck, and she was sitting at the north window, the one that opens into the yard. She held a looking-glass in both hands, and was staring at her reflection. Her right cheek—the one I could see—was pink.

She jumped up with a gasp of fear, a hoarse little noise, when I went in, and faced me with the looking-glass held to her breast like a shield. " What do you want ? " she asked, but her voice was quiet.

I closed the door behind me and said, " If you had asked me that a week ago, I couldn't have answered you. I might have said *Everything* or *Nothing*. I didn't know. But that was a week ago."

" What does that matter to me ? " she asked. " Why have you come here ? "

" Because now," I said, " I do know."

" You have no right to come into my room," she whispered.

" I want you to marry me," I said. " I want a wife."

She flushed and asked me, " Why do you think you can find one here ? "

Then I told her, or tried to tell her, why nothing had any force or weight in my mind, after seeing her as I had seen her that morning, but to live with her in the love of a man for his wife, in the love of possession without term or hindrance. She turned pale, then red again, when I said that I had seen her wrestling with the gander, and tried to push me out. But I caught her by the wrists, and spoke as a man will when he is wooing, in fumbling and broken words, of her beauty and the worship I would give her. Fiercely, but in a

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voice as low as a whisper still, she cried, " I want no one's worship !"

" Last night," I said, as urgently but as softly as she spoke herself—for the old woman was sleeping only a few yards away—" Last night my mind was full of bitterness and grief. There had been little else in it for a year or more. But I emptied it, last night, and this morning you came into its emptiness and took possession. And I'm not going to live again like a man who's haunted. I'm not going to live with a ghost in my mind, with a ghost walking on my nerves as if they were a tight-rope, a ghost outside the window of my eyes and just beyond my fingers ! I want reality. I want you, in my arms as well as in my mind, and I want the Church and the Law to seal you there."

She answered nothing to that, and I went on talking, but I don't think she listened very closely, for presently she interrupted and asked me, " Where did the gander go ? "

" Down the burn towards the loch," I told her.

" That's where he came from. He came here about a month ago, and killed the old one. The gander we had before, I mean."

" He won't come back," I said. " He's had enough of you, after the way you handled him."

She turned to the window, the one that opens into the yard, and looked out, saying nothing. I went behind her and put my arms round her. She tried to push me away, but with no determination in her movement, and I talked some more. She listened to me now, and presently turned and faced me, and said yes.

The next morning I began my new life of work and responsibility. I bought a boat, a heavily built, round-bellied dinghy, ten-and-a-half-foot keel and in need of paint, for eighteen pounds ten. Two days later I took a summer visitor out fishing and made fifteen shillings for six hours' easy work. It was a good fishing loch, and there were visitors in the islands again for the first time since 1939. I could look forward to three or four days' work a week, and as trout were selling for two and ninepence a pound I sent home for my own rod and tackle, and did quite well on my unemployed days in addition to enjoying them. I could have done still better with night-lines and an otter at dusk and a little caution, but I like fishing too much to cheat at it.

I was still living with the schoolmaster, for two pounds per week, but our relations became a little cooler when his wife discovered that I was sleeping out. That didn't worry me, however, for my happiness that summer was like the moon and the stars, shining and beyond the reach of malice.

It puzzled me a little that I couldn't persuade Lydia to settle a date for the wedding, as I thought there might be a proper reason

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for it before long, but when I once spoke of it more seriously than usual, she said, " We're perfectly happy as we are. I don't see why we should bother. Not yet, at any rate. And I'll have to explain to mother, and she's difficult sometimes."

" I'll do any explaining that's necessary."

" No, no ! You must leave that to me. You won't say anything to her, will you ? "

I said I wouldn't. She asked very little of me—she never has asked much—and neither then nor now could I refuse her anything. She had made a good pretence of surrendering, but my surrender went deeper. I had become the roof and the walls within which she lived, but she was the soul of the house. I thought of Jim whenever I looked up at the Kirk hill and saw Norquoy's farm on the slope of it, but to think of him didn't make me feel guilty now. I was no longer obsessed by him, and if a new obsession had taken his place, I had no cause to grumble against it.

So June and July went quickly by in that happiness and in good weather, though not settled weather, for the island skies are always changeable, till one day in mid-August, when I came ashore in a rising wind, colder than it had been for weeks, the old woman met me and without a word of greeting said, " You'd better come home to your tea."

" That's very kind of you," I said, and pulled the boat up and took out the two trout which were all I had caught. " Would you like these ? " I asked.

" It's a poor return for a day's work," she said, though they were good fish, the better one a little over the pound, and slipped them into the pockets of the old raincoat she was wearing without a word of thanks. She had a man's cap on her head, and boots like a ploughman's. We walked along the road together, not saying much, and tea was a silent meal but a good one. She or Lydia had newly baked bere bannocks and white bannocks, there was sweet butter and salt butter, and I ate a duck's egg and the half of a stewed cock-chicken. Then, when we had finished, she said, " Lydia tells me that you're wanting to be married."

" It's what I've been wanting for the last two months and more," I told her.

" She couldn't agree, and you wouldn't expect her to, until she'd spoken to her mother about it," said the old woman grimly. " She's a good girl, and it's a treasure that you're getting."

I told her, humbly, that I was well aware of that.

" You've been a soldier, she says ? "

" For six years I was."

" I'm glad of that," she cried, nodding her head. " It's an ill world we live in, and there's times when the soldiers are all we can

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depend on, though it's a fool's trade if you look at it squarely."

I had nothing to say to that, and she went on briskly: "Well, if you're going to be married you'll be married in a decent manner, with the neighbours there to see it, and something good enough for them to remember, too."

"A wedding," I said, "is a woman's affair. I'm willing to be married in any way that suits Lydia. If she wants a big wedding, we'll have it. I've got about a hundred and sixty pounds in the bank—"

"We're not asking you for money," said the old woman. "It's not a pauper you're marrying, no, faith! nor anything like poverty neither."

She went to an old black wooden desk that stood in a corner of the kitchen, with a calendar pinned above it, and took a bank pass-book from a pigeon-hole stuffed with papers. "Look at that," she said, and held it open in front of me.

I was flabbergasted. It had never occurred to me that they could have any money at all, but the pass-book showed a credit of one thousand two hundred and seven pounds.

"Eight hundred and fifteen pounds of that is Lydia's own money," said the old woman. "Five hundred pounds came to her when she was born, and the rest is the interest which I've never touched and never shall. Her money will be hers to spend as she wants when she's of age—you've got three years to wait, so you needn't go to market yet—and the wedding I'll pay for out of my own."

She gave me a dram then, and took one herself. Just the one each—it was the first time I had tasted whisky since that night at the Norquoys'—and then she put the bottle away in a cupboard with some fancy tumblers and glass dishes. She went out to the byre after that, to milk their two cows, and left Lydia and me together. Lydia had hardly spoken a word since I came in.

The following Sunday the banns were read in the Parish Church, and a few days later the old woman showed me the invitation cards she had had printed for the wedding. She hadn't done it cheaply, that was clear. They were a good thick board with gilt edges, and they read:

Miss Thomasina Manson
requests the pleasure of your company
at the wedding of her daughter
Lydia
to Mr. Robert Lacey Tyndall
in the Ladyfirth Parish Hall
at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, September 6th

R.S.V.P. *Dancing*

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I said they had a very dignified appearance, and so they had if you weren't so hidebound by convention as to be startled by the prefix to the mother's name. The old woman was very proud of them, and propped one up on the chimney-piece. Then Lydia and I sat down at the kitchen table and began to write in names and address envelopes. The old woman had prepared a list, and there were two hundred and eighteen names on it. But by then I was beyond surprise.

I had no difficulty in dissuading my own parents from coming. I had always been the unwanted member of my family, and I had disillusioned them so often that they could guess the disappointment they would find in my wedding. They had grown accustomed to my disappointing them. I had never enjoyed teaching in an elementary school in Falkirk—that was due to my falling in love, at the age of nineteen, with a female Socialist with red hair and the sort of figure that, in a jersey, is like an incitement to riot—but they were shocked by my choice of a profession. They were less perturbed when, later, I went to sea as a deck-hand on a tramp steamer. They didn't like that, but they regarded it as an escapade.

In comparison with the rest of the family I was, of course, an utter failure, for both my brothers had gone to Oxford and done well there, and my sister had married the junior partner in a highly regarded firm of stockbrokers. When Archie, my elder brother, was given an O.B.E. my father was much better pleased than when I got my D.C.M.

Neither he nor my mother made any serious offer to come to the wedding. I used to get drunk, when I was younger, and once or twice I had caused them serious embarrassment, so I suppose they thought I should get high, loud, and truculent, and make a spectacle of myself. My father sent Lydia a dressing-case, for which she could discover no purpose at all, and me a cheque for twenty-five pounds. But he missed something by not coming himself.

The old woman wore a black dress that had belonged to her mother, and a man's cap. Not the old ragged tweed one she usually wore, but a new black one such as countrymen sometimes wear at a funeral. She sat in a high-backed chair beside the band, and it was easy enough to guess her thoughts. "I bore my child without benefit of clergy or the neighbours' goodwill," she was thinking, "but my child, by God! will have all the favour and fair wishes that money can buy. My child will be wedded as well as bedded, and no one will forget it."

And no one who saw her will forget Lydia that night. I realized that I still had things to learn, for though I had doted on her beauty, now I was humbled by it. By her beauty and her dignity. I stood beside her, while the Minister was reading the service, and felt like a

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Crusader keeping his vigil. The schoolmaster was my best man, though his wife hadn't wanted him to be, and I could hear him breathing, hoarsely, as if in perplexity. He ate little more than I did at supper, and I could eat nothing. I danced twice with Lydia, and the rest of the time stood like a moon-calf while people talked to me. But Lydia was never off the floor, and all night her mother, in the high-backed chair beside the band, sat with a look that was simultaneously grim and gloating.

There was a great crowd there, the fiddlers were kept hard at it, and the wedding was well spoken of. Nearly everyone who had been invited had come, and thirty or forty more as well. All the Norquoys were there, but John and his wife left about two o'clock. Before he went he said to me, " I'm very glad that you've become one of us, and I hope you'll settle down happily here. You were a good friend to Jim, and if I can help you in any way, be sure and tell me."

" There's no one can help me more," I told him, " than by wishing that as I am tonight, so I may continue."

Lydia came to say good-bye to them while we were speaking, and after they had gone she said, " Jim Norquoy was always my mother's favourite among the boys in the parish. She used to tell him that he mustn't be in a hurry to get married, but wait till I grew up and see what he thought of me before going farther afield."

The schoolmaster came and asked her to dance, and I went outside. The hall was hot and men's faces shone as if they had been oiled, but the night air was cool. There was no wind and the sky was a veiled purple with a little haze round the moon. I could hear the slow boom and dulled thunder of the Atlantic on the west cliffs, four miles away.

West of the cliffs there was no land nearer than Labrador, and for a few minutes I felt dizzy, as if I hung in space over a gulf as great as that. The old woman had meant to marry her to Jim, but Jim had died, and I had fallen heir to his portion. " You won't find it easy to go back," he had said, as if he knew that another fate would claim me. Nor had I gone back to my own country, but come instead to his, to do what I had to.

It was nearly seven in the morning when the wedding finished, with the drink done, the band exhausted, and the guests hearing in their imagination the lowing of their cows waiting to be milked. Lydia and her mother and I walked home together, and as soon as we arrived the two of them changed into old clothes and went out to the byre.

Her wedding, however, wasn't the only time when I saw Lydia well-dressed. She had gone to the town day after day, and bought clothes in plenty. Her more ancient garments were thrown away, and her everyday appearance was now smart enough by country

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standards. She told me one night that it was her mother who had insisted on her dressing like a scarecrow, and often enough wouldn't even let her wash her face for fear of bringing men about the house.

The weeks passed with nothing to spoil our happiness, and I got a job under the County Council, driving a lorry. The mornings and the evenings grew darker, and after a great gale had blown for three days from the north-west the winter came.

When I came home one evening about the middle of November, the old woman told me that Lydia wasn't well. There was nothing seriously wrong, but she would have to stay in bed for a few weeks, and she wanted her—the old woman—to make up a bed for herself in the ben-room. I would have to sleep in the loft.

" The doctor has seen her ? " I asked.

" No," said the old woman. " I don't believe in doctors."

I had a general knowledge that accidents might occur in pregnancy, but no precise information, and I couldn't make a physiological picture in my mind. I thought of blood and mortality, and the old woman saw that I was frightened.

" Don't fret yourself," she said. " She's not going to die yet, nor for many a long year to come. She'll be a brisk, stirring woman long after you're in the kirkyard."

" Is it only rest that she needs ? " I asked then, thinking vaguely of some anatomical bolt or washer that might have shaken loose, and needed immobility to re-establish itself.

" Rest," said the old woman, " a long rest and a lot of patience. Now go in and see her, but don't worry her with questions."

Lydia was pale and she had been crying, but when I knelt beside the bed she put her arms round my neck and told me, as her mother had done, that I mustn't worry. And I didn't worry long. Two or three days, I suppose, and then it began to seem natural that she should have to stay in bed. I took to reading to her when I came home from work. My mother had sent a lot of things that belonged to me, including a box of books. I never had many books, I can't remember having had much time for reading when I was younger, but there were some good stories of adventure that I had enjoyed : *Typhoon* and *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Kim*, and *The White Company*, and Trelawny's *Adventures of a Younger Son*, *Kidnapped*, and *The Forest Lovers*, and *Revolt in the Desert*, and so on. I've read them all to Lydia at one time or another, and she seemed to enjoy them. I liked reading them again.

Only one thing happened to annoy me in the next two or three months, and that occurred one morning when I was taking a load of road-metal to a secondary road we were patching, and drove past the old woman's cottage. It was a dark day, as dark as gunmetal, and the

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rain was blowing across country in blustering squalls. As I came near the cottage I saw Lydia crossing the road, leaning against the wind with a half-buttoned waterproof flapping round her, and a zinc pail on her arm. I pulled up hard and jumped out.

"Are you trying to kill yourself?" I shouted. "You're supposed to be in bed, aren't you?"

For the first time since the morning when I'd seen her throwing the gander out of doors, she was angry. Her face seemed to grow narrower than usual, and her lips as hard as marble. She stared straight at me—her eyes are grey, with sometimes a flash of blue in them—and said fiercely, "I can look after myself. You go about your business, and I'll take care of mine."

"You're supposed to be in bed," I said again, stupidly and sullenly. There were some eggs in her pail. They had a hen-house across the road, and she had been feeding the hens and gathering what eggs the draggled birds had the strength to lay in that weather. "It's madness for you to be stooping and bending and carrying buckets of meal," I said.

"I wanted some fresh air," she said. "I can't stay in bed for ever."

"Your mother ought to know better, even if you don't. I'm going in to see her," I said.

"You'll do no such thing!" she cried. "You leave mother and me to manage our own affairs. Don't you interfere, or you'll be sorry for it. And now go! Go, I tell you. You've got work to do, haven't you? Well, go and do it!"

She was ten years younger than I and a good head shorter, but her words came like the smack of an open hand on my face, palm and knuckles, this way and that, and I stepped back, muttering some limp excuse, and got into my lorry again.

I brought her some oranges at night, that I'd bought from a sailor, and we said no more about it. But two or three days passed before she asked me to read to her again, and then for another six or seven weeks we were calm and happy, though the loft was a cold place to sleep in, and sometimes when the moon shone through the skylight I woke up to see the rafters and their black shadows, and thought for a moment or two that I was still in the Army, making the best of it in a deserted farmhouse, and once I stretched out my arm to feel if Jim was beside me.

About the middle of February I began to worry about arrangements for her lying-in. Or, to put it more accurately, to worry because no arrangements had been made. I talked with the old woman, who wouldn't listen to me, or wouldn't listen seriously, but I didn't say anything to Lydia in case I should upset her again. And

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then, before we had come to any decision, I got a telegram from Edinburgh to say that my father had had a stroke, and would I come at once. I had never got on well with my father, but the old woman said that if he died without seeing me I would be saddled with regret, like a heavy curse on me, for all the days of my life, and Lydia was plainly shocked, as if by the sight of some fearful wickedness, when I said that he could die as happily by himself as with me holding his hand.

So, after a day of argument, I went to Edinburgh, and for a week my mother and I were uncomfortable in each other's presence, and my father slowly recovered. I had been wrong when I said that he wouldn't want to hold my hand. He did. I sat by his bedside for two or three hours every day, and sometimes, with a lot of difficulty, he managed to speak a few words. I was glad, then, that I had done what Lydia wanted.

I said good-bye to them in a hurry when a letter came from Lydia to say that she had given birth to a daughter the day after I left her. "I am very well and so is she," she wrote, "and I didn't want to disturb you with my news when you had so much to harass you already. But now, if your father is no longer in danger, I hope you will be able to come home again."

I said good-bye, but I didn't leave them for another fortnight. My father had a second stroke, and while I was sitting in the train and waiting for it to start, my sister came running along the platform, looking for me, to tell me I mustn't go. He lived for more than a week, but never regained proper consciousness, and then I waited for the funeral. I read Lydia's letter again and again, and two others that she wrote, both of which were full of news about the child. "I think she may be the most beautiful baby in the world," she said.

In my mind, when I saw her, there was no doubt at all. She had the perfection of a doll that some dead sculptor—a sculptor too great to be alive in this world—had carved in love from a rosy-veined alabaster. She was very small, and perfect. She was sleeping, and I had a monstrous fear that she might never wake. I put out my hand to touch her, but Lydia caught my wrist and shook her head. "Let her sleep."

I made no mention of something I found, a day or so after my return, for I couldn't be certain, then, that there was any meaning in it, and if there was I didn't want to think about it. The sight of it, in the grass, struck deep into my mind like a forester's wedge that splits the fibres of a tree, and for a minute or two I stood trembling. But there was no sense in it, and I didn't want to curse myself with a madman's doubt. I wanted to be at peace, and dote upon the child, so I denied the meaning of it and let it drown in the daily ebb and flow, the tidal waters of common life. It sank into the darker parts

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of my mind like a body into the deep sea with a sack of coal lashed to its ankles, as I had seen a sailor buried once.

The child grew quickly, and at six months she was like an Italian picture of a cherub, her head covered with small tight curls, paler than gold, and eyes the colour of a harebell. The old woman said she could understand already every word we said, and neither Lydia nor I was very serious about contradicting her. For we all thought of her in a way that I can't suppose is usual even in the fondest of parents. It wasn't only with pride of possession and a flood of affection whenever we looked at her, but with a kind of glee that never grew stale or sour in the remembrance of its excess.

In May I gave up my job but told the Road Surveyor that I should be glad to have it again in October. I painted my boat, put my rod together, and had a week's fine sport before the first of the summer visitors arrived. Then, for three or four days a week till September, I watched my patrons fish, and calculated by the end of September that my own average, on the intervening days, was about as good as the best of theirs. But I fished longer hours than they did, and the price of trout was still high.

Sometimes I used to wake up at night, with Lydia beside me, and see the darkness about us like the mouth of a huge engulfing fear. I had no right to be so happy. No one had such a right. It was like oil on the top step, it was like a German white flag with a sniper lying beside it, it was like a spider telegraphing *Walk-into-my-parlour* over his lethal gossamer. I would lie in the darkness, open-eyed, for perhaps an hour, drenched in fear, but in the morning, waking and turning to Lydia, and then playing with the child for half an hour, my happiness would come back like the returning tide. I couldn't help it. They were both so beautiful.

Once, when the child was about fifteen months old, I woke in the first phase of one of my frightened moods, and saw her standing up at the end of her crib. She had taken off her nightgown and she was poised with her head tilted up, her arms out and her hands resting on the side-rails of the crib as if she were addressing a public meeting; or facing her judges, unafraid. There was a late moon that night, and though the window was small there was light in the room. But that wasn't the light that irradiated the child. Her light, unless I'm the simple victim of some cuckoo-born delusion, came from within.

Now Lydia's body, on that first morning when I saw her throwing the gander out of doors, was gleaming like mother-of-pearl, or a pearl on velvet, with a light of its own; but never since then had I seen her better than a milky white. As white as milk and as smooth as curds, but not with that radiance. Yet now the child, naked in the

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darkness, was gleaming with such a light. It was no brighter than the moonlight dimmed by white curtains, but it wasn't in the overflow of moonlight she was shining. It was in a light of her own.

I slipped out of bed, quietly so as not to waken Lydia, and said to the child, "You'll catch cold, standing up like that. You ought to be asleep." She looked at me for a moment, as if surprised to see me there, and then twined her arms round my neck and kissed me. I put on her nightgown and obediently she slid down between the blankets.

A year went by and part of another. I came, I suppose, to take my good fortune for granted, and my happiness perhaps lost something of its fine edge and became a rounder contentment. We were on friendly terms with our neighbours, I saw the Norquoys and the schoolmaster every week or two, and gradually I came to think of the islands as my own place, my proper environment in which I had become an accepted part. But my real life was lived on the old woman's croft, at home. My senses were livelier there, my feelings more profound, my consciousness of life more widely awake.

The old woman could work as well as a man. She could plough and harrow, and between us, when harvest came, we cut and bound and stacked four acres of oats. Lydia looked after the poultry, and singled turnips, took her fork to hayfield and harvest, as well as doing housework and tending the child. We were rarely idle and often our work was hard, though I don't remember that we found it unduly hard because we did it all in our own time, and we had no master to drive us or reprove us or thank us.

Well, this good easy life continued—it wasn't physical ease that characterized it, not in those northern winters, but we were all contented—till the child was in her third year, and then one summer day when there fell a flat calm and the loch lay like a mirror, pocked with rising trout, but not one that would look at a fly, I came ashore at midday and on the road a little way past the house I saw five carts standing, three of them loaded with peat and two empty.

The loaded ones, coming home from the hill, were John Norquoy's, and the horses between their shafts stood motionless, with drooping heads, their shoulders dark with sweat. The empty carts belonged to a neighbour of his who had started earlier and was on his way back to the hill for a second load. His horses were restless, tossing their heads and pecking at the road with steel-shod hooves. But their drivers paid no attention to them. John Norquoy and two others were squatting on their heels, on the road, and two were leaning against the nearest cart, and in the midst of them, her hands behind her back like a girl reciting poetry at a village prize-giving, was the child. She was talking, and they were listening.

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I waited for a little while, some forty yards away, but none of them turned a head in my direction, and when I went up and spoke to them some looked sheepish and embarrassed, but John Norquoy, still on his heels, said to me, " I could wish you had stayed away and not interrupted us. It's a real diversion, listening to her."

I picked the child up and asked her, "What were you talking about ? "

" I was telling them a story," she said, and when I set her on my shoulder she turned and cried to them, " Good-bye now ! "

I don't fully know why, but this small incident annoyed me at the time of it and worried me later. I told Lydia and her mother what I had seen, and said they would have to take better care of the child, for I wasn't going to have her grow up to believe she must always be the centre of attention. I didn't like to see a child showing off, I said. " Perhaps," I went on, " we ourselves are to blame, for we've always made much of her—too much, I dare say—and let her see that we're proud of her. But we'll have to change our ways if they're going to have a bad effect."

" We could change our ways a dozen times without changing her," said Lydia.

" That's nonsense," I said. " A child is the product, very largely, of what she's taught. I used to be a teacher myself—"

The old woman interrupted me with a cackle of laughter. " It would take more than you," she said, " to make an ordinary bairn out of that one."

Then I lost my temper, and for the first time we had a proper quarrel. We had had differences of opinion before, and sometimes grown hot about them, but this was different. Now we grew bitter and said things to each other that were meant to hurt, and did. The argument didn't last long, but at night, when Lydia and I were alone, it flared up again. It was she who began it, this time, and when I saw that she was bent on making trouble—her face put on its fierce and narrow look, her lips were hard—I smacked her soundly on the side of her head, and before she could recover I laid her across my knee and gave her an old-fashioned beating with a slipper.

A week or two passed before she forgave me. Or, perhaps, before she openly forgave me. I knew her fairly well by that time, and I don't think she bore a grudge against me for the beating, but because she didn't want to admit defeat she maintained an appearance of hostility till the affair could be regarded as a drawn battle. Then for a week or two we were in love again with a new fervour.

It was towards the end of February, a few days before the child's third birthday, that the gander came back, and I realized that fear of his return, an unregarded but persistent fear, like the white

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wound-scar on my leg that I never thought of unless I was tired or there came a hard frost, had always been with me.

There had been heavy snow, piled into great drifts by a strong wind, and I had gone out with my gun to try and shoot a late hare. After following tracks in the snow for an hour or two I had got a couple. I was on my way home again when I saw, by the burnside a few hundred yards from the house, the child in her blue cap and her little blue coat. The burn, bank-high, was running strongly, and I hurried towards her with a sudden feeling, as of a man caught among thorns, of nervousness and annoyance that she should be there with no one to look after her.

She stood with her back to me, in her favourite position, her hands clasped behind her, and not until I had come within a few yards of her did I see the gander. He was afloat in a little smooth backwater of the burn, but as soon as he caught sight of me he came ashore, his broad feet ungainly on the snow but moving fast, and I thought he was going to attack me. The child turned and I called to her: "Come here, Nell! Come here at once!"

But she stayed where she was and the gander came up behind her and opened his wings so that she stood by his breast within a screen of feathers as hard as iron and as white as the snow beyond them. It must have been the whiteness of the fields, with the bright haze of the sun upon them, that dazzled me and deluded me into thinking that the gander had grown to three times or four times his proper size. His neck seemed a column of marble against the sky, his beak was bronze, and his black eyes reflected the sun like shafts from a burning-glass. A low rumbling noise, like the far-off surge of the sea on a pebble beach, came from his swollen throat.

I'm not a coward and I couldn't have been frightened of a bird. It was snow-sickness, I suppose, that set my brain swimming and undid the strength of my knees, so that I thought I was going to faint. I remember seeing the same sort of thing happen to a soldier in Italy, in the mountains in winter-time. He was a friend of my own, a big fellow as tall as myself. He stumbled and fell, and the strength went out of him. We thought he had gone blind, but after we got him into a house and had given him some brandy, he was all right.

When I came to myself and knew what I was doing, I was on my hands and knees, crawling, and my hands were on fire with the friction of the snow. I had to crawl another twenty or thirty yards before I felt fit to stand up, and then I staggered and stumbled as if I were drunk. I wasn't far from home by then, and I rested for a while in the barn.

When I felt better I went into the kitchen. The child was there already, and as soon as I came in she ran towards me, and pushing

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me into a chair climbed on to my knee. She began to pat my face and play with my hair, as if trying to comfort me.

Presently I went out again, and found my gun and the two hares where I had dropped them. There was no sign of the gander. They were big hares, both of them, and I took them into the back-kitchen and got a basin, and cleaned and skinned them. But all the time I was thinking: Well, this is the end of pretence. There's no point or purpose in denial now. But what am I going to do?

The women were on the other side, so I couldn't talk to them. Lydia was in love with me, as I with her—there was no doubt about that—and the old woman liked me well enough; but now I knew the dividing-line between us, and I couldn't cross it. But I had to talk to someone.

John Norquoy wouldn't do. I had made a confession to him before, and it was too soon to make another. Nor would he believe me if I did. I had no great faith in the schoolmaster, either, but I had to do something, say something to someone, and after tea I set out for his house, walking heavily through the snow, and if he was surprised to see me he didn't show it, but made me welcome. He had spent three or four idle days, with only a dozen children able to come to school, and in his own way he too may have been glad of a chance to talk for a while. His wife left us to ourselves.

I didn't know how to begin, but he helped me. He had been reading a book whose author was trying to prove that modern war was the result of conflicting demands for oil; and he, full of brand-new information, was ready to argue that war had always had economic causes, and no other causes. I didn't believe him, and said so. It was ideas that made war, I said. If an economist went to war, with material gains in view, it was because he was a bad economist, a quack and a charlatan; for any practical economist knows that war is likely to waste far more than it can win. "But if men believe in ideas, of power and glory, or religious ideas, or even social ideas," I went on, "they may go to war for the simple reason that idealists don't count the cost of what they want. They go to war, that is, in despite of the economic arguments against it. And they're always against it."

We talked away on those lines, getting warmer all the time, and the schoolmaster, really enjoying himself now, went back into history, back and back, till he had proved to his own satisfaction that the Peloponnesian War was due entirely to the imperialism of Athens, and the determination of the Athenians to brook no interference with their mercantile marine.

"And did Agamemnon and Menelaus," I asked him, "go to war to win the right of exploiting mineral resources in the windy plains of Troy?"

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" If we really knew anything about the Trojan War," he said, " we should probably have to admit that that indeed was the cause of it; or something very like that."

" It's not the generally accepted cause," I said.

" According to the fable," he answered, " the purpose of the war was to recover, from the person who had carried her off, the erring wife of Menelaus. And who was she? Zeus, who never existed, is said to have visited a fictitious character called Leda in the guise of a swan, and the result of their impossible union was a legendary egg out of which a fabulous being named Helen was incredibly hatched. Helen, says the story, grew to miraculous beauty, married Menelaus, and ran away with Paris. You can't seriously regard a woman who wasn't even a woman, but only a myth, as the cause of a war."

" It lasted for ten years," I said.

He got up impatiently and fetched a bottle of whisky and two glasses from the sideboard. Then he went out for a jug of water, and when he came back I said, " What's worrying me is this. If a man discovers something within the scope of his own life that will eventually be a cause of war between nations, what can he do about it? "

" What could such a thing be? " he asked.

" I can't explain."

" But it's impossible," he said. " War hasn't a simple origin or a single cause that you can take in your hand like a trophy to be fought for in a tournament. You have to consider the whole economy of the rival countries, their geographical situation, the growth of their population—"

" And their ideas," I said. " Their leaders' desire for power, or a new religion, or a woman."

" You're going back to your myth," he said.

" You fought in one war, I fought in another. My experience of war is that you fight for five years, and at the end of it you see your best friend killed beside you, and you're glad—you're glad, by God! —that it's he who's dead, and not you. I don't want another war."

" Well," he said, " whatever starts the next war, it won't be a woman. You can put that fear out of your head."

" I'm not so sure," I said.

The argument went on for a long time, and gave me no satisfaction. But talking did me good, and we drank a lot of whisky. When I got home I felt calmer, but very old, as if I were a character in a Greek play who saw the enormous tragedy that was coming, and could do nothing but wait for it, and then abide it.

Lydia and her mother were in bed, and I got a lantern from the back-kitchen. I lighted it and went to the stable. Meg, the old black

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mare, was twenty-seven or twenty-eight, and we dared not let her lie down in her stall for fear she could never get up again, so every night I put a broad canvas sling under her belly, to take the weight off her legs, and she slept standing. She woke as I went in, whinnying softly, and turned her head to watch me.

I stood on a wheelbarrow in the empty stall beside her, and reaching to the top of the wall, where the rafters go in, took down what I had hidden there, and never looked at since, nearly three years before. I had made a parcel of it, with string and brown paper, and now it was covered with thick cobweb. I brushed off the web and cut the string. For a moment or two I held in my hands the cigarette-box—covered with a fine Florentine leather stamped in gold, that I had taken from one of those little shops on the Ponte Vecchio—and then I opened it.

Inside lay the broken shell of a big white egg. I fitted the larger fragments together, and judged it to have been about seven inches long and rather more than four inches in diameter at the widest part.

That was what I had picked up, after coming home from my father's funeral, in the long grass under the ben-room window. It may seem funny to you, but you're not in my position.

* * *

CURTAIN LINE

There were three elderly ladies living in a charming little house. They kept it beautifully, everything was polished, everything was spotless, everything was tidy. One afternoon they returned from their walk and sat down to have tea in their orderly sitting room, where they had laid the table before going out.

One of them picked up her cup and said, " This cup is dirty. Someone has been using my cup ! "

The second sister gazed disgustedly at her favourite chair. " These cushions are all rumpled. Someone has been sitting in my chair ! "

The third sister had run upstairs to take off her hat, and found a man lying in her bed. She called downstairs, " Good night all ! "

NAOMI JACOB, *Me—Looking Back*

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ELLEN TERRY'S DIAMOND RING

It was a symbol of hope, a talisman for the future

by MICHAEL FOSTER

WHEN my uncle walked along the lurching aisle of a train, he looked like a million dollars about to happen. He had personality, he had flash. He was what was known in those days as a snappy dresser. I remember a bright brown suit he wore that year, long ago, and his many gay ties. The train might be toiling through the wastelands of Montana, or the painted mesa country of the Southwest, and the plush seats of the carriage gritty with cinders and dust. For lunch we might have bought withered ham sandwiches and a couple of chocolate bars from the cigarette kiosk. There was always a baby somewhere, crying with the heat, and dishevelled rows of wilted people. Long-distance travel is wonderful now, air conditioned and smooth: it wasn't then.

But when my uncle Walt got up to stroll to the smoker in front, next to the luggage vans, he somehow carried with him the air of all the things he didn't have—twenty dollar bills, grandly careless and important deals just coming up. He carried with him somehow the atmosphere of the richer parts of the train that we hardly ever saw—the dining car with little rose-shaded lamps on white table-cloths, the quiet splendours of the brass-railed observation car. Neatly keeping his balance, though the train might be leaning on a curve, he would open the vestibule door and for a moment the carriage would be filled with the clatter and roar of speed. Then the door would close behind him, and he would be gone.

I haven't seen him now for years. But one afternoon last August, I was thinking about him.

I was sitting in an empty theatre on West Forty-seventh Street; beside me in the third row of the dark house sat Al Backler, our producer, gazing gently at the end of his cigar. On the bare stage the hollow echoing voices had trailed off and stopped; under the harsh glare of the working lights up there four or five men and women in their ordinary street clothes stood around chatting in undertones, with the exaggerated social ease of actors and actresses who know that rehearsals are going very badly, very badly indeed.

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Walking quickly, my wife came down from the stage and slipped into the seat next to mine.

"We'd better take it off," she said. "We'd better take this piece off and find another one. Even Jim can't pull it through. Can you, Jim?"

I didn't say anything. I've been directing a long time, good seasons and bad. But this was Elizabeth's first chance of a starring part. And I had thought the play was just made for her. She's so young—so young, and so serious.

Al said unhappily, "Take it easy, baby."

Dimly, from the summer streets outside, we could hear the hoarse, ceaseless monotone of New York traffic. It was after four o'clock.

"Jim!—Al thinks so too," Elizabeth said. "I've been in difficult plays, I want difficult parts. But this isn't coming right at all. I don't think we can make it come right. We can't! Everybody up there is lost. We can't get any meaning into it. We know it's there, but we aren't getting it."

She was leaning across me, talking to Al now. Her face, so near—I watched the lovely tension of lips and throat, the strong and delicate pride of profile. I could smell faintly the gardenia perfume which she just barely touches behind her ears. But her dark hair was skinned back tight from her face, and pinned. Her fingers, clasped, were white and shaking. Like nearly all good actresses I have ever known, she is harsh-drawn and almost homely in the strain of rehearsals.

Al sighed, and began telling her that at this point lots of plays looked bad; but Elizabeth was too experienced in stage-craft. She slid down in her seat and, long legged, propped her knees up against the back of the seat in front of her. While they talked, I sat turning hesitantly the pages of the script, of that fine and thoughtful play, about to be lost. It was a play I liked. Al had promised I could have it for Elizabeth and for myself. It said things that needed saying. It had strong and bitter reminders of things about America that we had better remember now, if we are ever going to. The title I liked too, *The Years of Burden*, because it said something about what we are doing and are going to have to do in the world and in the future. There's nobody else but us to do it. If we remember.

The other people of the cast were drifting off the stage, into the wings. I sat turning the pages, but I wasn't reading. I was thinking of my uncle Walt and his girl. It was of strange importance to me in this moment of failure between Elizabeth and myself.

It was immediately after the first World War, that year I was

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on the road with them. I was seventeen, an awkward and gangly kid straight from school in a small dusty Kansas town; with my bony ankles and wrists sticking out of a bottle green suit of clothes, snappily half belted at the back, anxiously picked out of a mail-order catalogue. Standing on a station platform somewhere at sunset, I tried to be helpful while Walt counted our big worn-out trunks and cases as they came tumbling thunderously out of a baggage car. The evening air was filled with shouts and hurryings, and the smoke from the engine went drifting lazily off downwind. Honey-blonde and frail in a crumpled tan travelling costume, Nell Harris stood there with us—Walt's girl. She was beautiful and tired.

And that evening John Colton was there too, talking to Nell. He was a gentle fellow, shy of manner and awfully earnest, and no amount of hard travel could disguise the fact that his shabby tweeds had been cut for him by one of the best tailors in Boston. Undoubtedly the same conservative family of tailors which had suited his grandfather. He was that kind of a young man—everything Walt was not. Walt would not dare to be shabby. Flashy and perspiring, Walt turned to look at him pleasantly, and suddenly in the midst of the uproar of unloading there was a tight shell of silence enclosing just the four of us. John flushed slightly, his eyes sort of humble but very steady; and Nell seemed to shrink a little. It was the first intimation I had that anything was going wrong.

A couple of painted tin signs, battered and lurid, came clattering down out of the luggage van and Walt and I picked them up. We carried them to the hotel coach which was backed up to the platform. Each sign had a couple of iron hooks on top, and we hung them on the coach, one on each side. Partly obscuring the gilt lettered name of the hotel, each sign blared:

MELTYNGE-GINTNER REPERTORY TOURS.

But they had different slogans painted underneath. The one I was hanging up said: "*A Smile and A Tear from Broadway to Here.*" Walt's said: "*Not a Chuckle the Old Folks will Miss—Not a Line the Kiddies Should Not Hear.*"

The other members of the company had climbed wearily in through the open rear of the coach and were sitting in two rows facing each other on the uncomfortable lengthwise seats: seven men and women worn by life and the long hard roads. Nell and John came along right away to get into the coach; but while John went in to sit with the others, Nell paused at the low rear step to lay her hand for a moment on Walt's arm. Looking down at her, he smiled.

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Then, when he had handed her in, the smile creased and widened, for everybody. And in spite of themselves, the sad eyes of our company came alive, a little as they did when the curtain went slowly up and the footlights were there for them. Walt always had a careless grin, quick and tough, and a flip of the hand for the hard luck of the road. We watched the coach lurch off, on its way through the streets to the hotel, before we went back towards our pile of baggage, our poor old junk lying stacked there on the platform in the last of the sunlight. We got a couple of porters busy, and then we walked up to the local theatre.

Walt was company manager, which meant also being stage manager and playing small character parts. We had no star; Nell Harris and John Colton were our leading woman and man. Usually we got into a town early enough so the company could rest at least part of the day in the hotel before our first evening show: but not here. I was still unpacking the clothes, the pistol, the handcuffs, and the bric-à-brac for that night's play when the men and women came drifting in from a quick supper, looking for their dressing rooms. I was general factotum and property-man. Walt paid me out of his own pocket. My mother had died and I had nowhere else to go.

It was a little later, just before curtain time, in Nell's dressing room, that she and Walt had the first quarrel I'd ever heard them have. I was coming along the dark corridor, getting ready to knock on the doors with the warning call, but Nell's door was open and Walt was standing just inside.

"I don't blame you, kid," he was saying.

"Oh, Walt. Please," she said wearily. And then in swift feminine anger: "Blame me for what?"

"Well, for John Colton," he said. I had never heard such miserable depths of bitterness as were in his voice.

Confused with horror I just dumbly stopped, there in the shadows of the corridor. A kid doesn't know what to do when he stumbles on to a grownup quarrel. Sitting in front of her lighted mirror Nell was dressed and ready, all made up. The glistening violet eye-shadow with long lines exaggerating the outer corners of the lids made her eyes a more brilliant and lighter grey. Walt was made up too. In tonight's play he was a butler, a regular stage butler in a striped vest, with side-wheel whiskers gummed on to his face. But there was none of the "Laugh, Clown, Laugh" then about Walt. He was one of the most humanly angry men I have ever seen.

"John Colton and I have never been alone together in our lives!" Nell said superbly—and honestly. But her following silence was honest, too.

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After that broken pause, I heard Walt's voice grating in reply. Because laughter and gaiety were habits with him, they were still in that voice—but they were like butterflies' wings being ground up. I don't know what he said, for by that time I was at the far end of the corridor. I was knocking on a dusty door, and calling: "Five minutes, please."

It's funny about human things—I mean about good people doing the best they can. You know there is a story there; but when you try to tell it, the way you remember it, you get as confused and mixed up as their poor human motives were. I am not sure I am going to be able to tell this right; for these people I loved.

That night I watched Walt standing in the wings, when he didn't know anyone was near. Those woolly grey whiskers round his ears caught the reflected radiance. He was watching Nell and John playing their big second-act scene. Their voices, their voices playing against each other. And I saw Walt's eyes.

There was no anger left. For the first time I saw—and I have seen it so often in my own mirror since—for the first time I saw a player's eyes when the drums weren't beating for him. And in the same moment I realized what it means to love your profession, truly and deeply, though you may not be much good at it yourself. Or perhaps I was only seeing what it means to be a good man. Selfless, as little men aren't. Because Walt caught sight of me and said:

"Come here, Jim. I want you to watch Colton work. I want you to remember the way he does things. I think we're watching a great actor."

And it was true. John Colton, beautifully underplaying, was turning that poor stock melodrama into a work of art. I think we all knew, even then, that here was one of the great actors, on the way up.

To us, he never mentioned his family in Boston. But we knew about them. And it didn't seem fair to us, to any of us tired and frightened people who were not born gently or fortunately—that this shy young man, who already had all the good things of the world, should also hold genius in his hand. When we worked so hard, and he made us look like drabs. With the drop of his voice, with a gesture so small . . . he didn't mean to, that was the bad part of it, he couldn't help it, but in their big scenes he somehow drained even Nell of all colour. His voice, so quiet, made hers sound reedy and overstrained. He was a studied artist, as well as a natural one, and before long he would be leaving people like us behind.

Now that I am a lot older, I think he had his own problems, in

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that poor trouping company of ours. Problems of tact, of human courtesy, aside from his emotional problem with Nell. When I was in Hollywood last year John Colton and I had lunch together. He has passed through the years of stardom to become even greater as a character actor. He still underplays, he still makes the eager tired people look like hams. Well, we had lunch, he and I. We talked together very guardedly. He is most distinguished.

But that night, long ago, when Nell came offstage in her mended dress, her face looked like a crushed flower. And unexpectedly, white under the paint, she put her head on Walt's shoulder. Shivering a little, and gone beyond her strength. The house was silent for John Colton's final line, which in that antique thriller was supposed to be suddenly shouted into a wooden box telephone fastened on one wall. Going through the preliminary business, building up suspense, John looked young and alone, but not lost. He was facing his world. And Walt's phony whiskers wobbled a little, a little tenderly, against Nell's hair. Walt knew.

" Hi, Baby," Walt said.

While John Colton's big second-act curtain line was hammering across the house.

" Oh, Walt," she said. " Walt."

I have never wrung my hands, and I don't know that I've ever actually seen anyone do it. But I think I came close to it then. As call-boy I said : " Curtain is down. Eight minutes to change."

John Colton came off the suddenly meaningless stage, wearing a glittering crown of sweat. He walked past the three of us without a glance.

I can't blame Nell too much for what happened from then on, while autumn came and deepened across the West, outside the fleeting dusty windows of our many trains. For three or four years she and Walt had wanted pitifully to get married—" Some day, some day, baby,"—and at any time during those years she would have taken the gamble. Nothing stood in their way except Walt's tough pride, his undiscouraged faith that fortune was somewhere not far away, for him to offer her ; and against this forlorn stubbornness Nell had gently broken her heart, mostly in silence and waiting.

This was the first year they had travelled in the same road-company. Before, they had always been in different ones for months at a time, often with the width of the continent between them. But they had a symbol—a talisman.

It was a ring which once had belonged to Ellen Terry. Large and glittering, it was only a piece of stage jewellery, set with a paste diamond ; it wouldn't be worth very much to anyone who was not

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of the theatre. But to our simple and believing hearts, it was an object of awe. For it actually had been on the finger of Ellen Terry, that superb woman. She too had once been poor and lonely and worked too hard; and from there she had made theatrical history that will live for all players as long as a curtain rustles upward.

The ring had been given to Walt by an old, old actress who had known Ellen Terry and been her friend. Nell carried it in her bag. It was always there. They saw in it more than the souvenir of a mighty legend—for them, that stage diamond had caught more than the London gaslight when Terry and Henry Irving, actor-manager, were playing their years of glory. To Walt and Nell it stood for all the magic, the belief, the occasional high integrity of the profession which so far had treated them so shabbily: it was the symbol of their hopes, a talisman for the future. Though perhaps by then Nell was beginning to see her future when she looked at one of the plodding middle-aged actresses in our third-rate road company.

When we got out to the coast we hit the autumn rains, and in a town in Oregon I heard something that just about stopped the clock. We had played three shows there, and were waiting for a train. It was late at night. There was a bare electric light globe, with the rain slanting across it. You saw a few feet of the shining steel rails, and the wind in gusts roughening a pool of water on worn bricks. In darkness at the far end of the platform, with my coat collar turned up and the wetness soaking through the shoulders of my snappy green suit, I sat on a trunk. I was keeping guard over our baggage, which was piled high between me and the light.

The rest of them, all but Walt and Nell, were in the waiting room: patient figures sitting on benches with their suitcases within reach. One old gentleman, a better actor than Walt—old Mr. Fellowes, who played stern fathers or jovial uncles or merciless employers in our melodramas—was asleep with his chin sunk on his thin breast. His mouth had a curiously wistful expression, as if unconsciousness could wipe away the years and the miles, leaving only the faith and the dream. His wife kept a boarding-house in St. Louis. I wished I could be in the waiting room too, because I had saved up for a tremendous new book on stage-design; it had come that day in the post, and I was in a fever of impatience to lose myself in it—to lose myself . . . Of them all, only John Colton was not resting: he was prowling nervously backwards and forwards, smoking cigarettes.

Shivering in the windy darkness, I saw Walt and Nell coming across the back street from an all-night café. They didn't go into the waiting room. They came walking slowly along the platform

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towards the pile of baggage, and they were quarrelling again. I heard Walt's helpless growl and Nell's reply, very clear:

"Well then, marry me now."

There was a strange hint of panic in her voice. And Walt didn't seem to catch it—too involved in his own emotional turmoil.

"We've waited so long—we'll wait a little longer and have it right," he said flatly. "It's got to be first class for us. It means too much."

"Whatever town we're in tomorrow, I'll marry you, Walt."

"We'll make Broadway next year for certain. This time, I've got the right wires laid, all ready to pull. You've seen my letters, I've brought you every one of them," he said. "This time, we can't miss, baby. We'll be married in the Little Church Around The Corner, like we've always said. That's meant so much to both of us, too."

"Any church will do now."

"I still want it to be a proud day when we're married, Nell. No small-town nameless beginning for us. Give me time, Nell dear—a little more time. I see my way clear, now. When I'm in, as stage manager, I can set you on Broadway, kid."

Stage manager—so Walt had bowed his head in farewell to the long hope of his youth, of some day being a top actor. In some dark night, alone, he had made that first surrender. I believed John Colton had done that to him.

"You aren't going to marry a failure, Nell. Of course," he said in an elaborate tone, "even when I'm a producer, all vulgar with flash money, I don't suppose I can give you the elegant cultured life that Colton could. He's been promising it, hasn't he, when you sit together on the train looking at the scenery?"

Behind the pile of baggage in the rain, I didn't move for fear they would see me and be ashamed. In misty wind-driven darkness they were silhouetted between me and the blurred electric light; though I could not distinctly see their faces, there were sharp wet points of glitter on hat-brim and lips and hands. Nell completely ignored John Colton's name. She had opened her bag and with angry fingers was fumbling among its contents.

"Well, I've asked a man to marry me, and he won't," she said, coldly furious. "So maybe you'd better keep this. Save it for Broadway, Walt."

Then she was walking quickly away, her heels clicking on the bricks, and I knew what Walt was left holding in his hand. The ring, that had been such magic to them. He stood there looking down at it, and far away there was the long fading whistle of the train, coming through the hills.

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So we travelled on. While autumn deepened into winter, and gritty snow blew across the windows of the trains. More towns, a dozen of them, twenty—I don't know. For a long time, ever since I had known them, everybody in the company had been worried, wondering if the Meltynge-Gintner offices, in Chicago, would disband this company and cancel its bookings. Now it was not a question of *if*. It was now only a question of *when* they would wind us up. Business was terrible. I've seen nights when a house half full encouraged us all.

And Walt carried that scared company part-way back across the continent by the sheer force of his dynamic will. I've never known anything like it. His good tough laugh, the way he walked, the wave of his hand—he carried us through. And the miracle was, when the crash did come, we were still believing in ourselves. He kept that pride and that courage in us; day after day and show after frightened show, we borrowed it from him.

I am glad I saw that hard time. I am glad I was in it. It was the last of the old theatre, it was the last of the strolling players in America. The films, in thousands of new shining cinemas, were triumphantly living down their nickelodeon past. The road—the theatre's great tradition of The Road—was making its last stand; and making it where old-fashioned American traditions have always made a stand: in the little sturdy towns.

We travelled cheaply. Most theatres had their own scenery. So we didn't carry very much, only a few special effects. Besides our costumes and our props, of course, in the trunks. Our plays were chosen for stock sets—a few interiors, a garden, a terrace, a forest—we found a way to make everything do. That's all the audiences expected. In each town, they had known those pieces of scenery all their lives. But the illusion, the illusion was there. In those simple-hearted days, they brought their own dreams. They didn't have to have them so expensively manufactured.

And in the gaslight, with its beautiful powdery quality, its rising motes, we played their dreams back to them. Another thing I remember, not quite with a sigh though it was long ago, not quite with a smile though it must have been grotesque—I can see a gaunt kid in a bottle-green suit, reading, forever reading books on stagecraft. Sitting on a sagging theatre fire-escape high above some dusty alley at sundown, or at some snack bar after midnight with an open book beside an empty coffee mug. I washed my own clothes and often went hungry to help buy those books.

Walt carried us on as far as he could. As far as a town in the hills of Tennessee. It was there, on a January morning, that the telegram came. Walt tacked it up on the bulletin board just inside the stage door. One by one, as the members of the company came

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in, they read it. We had finished our engagement there, we were supposed to leave by an afternoon train; but everything was cancelled, and we were disbanded. Old Mr. Fellowes, after peering studiously, took off his eye-glasses and twirled them with airy jauntiness on their black cord. Then he laid a hand on Walt's shoulder.

"I have read them before," he said. He cleared his throat, and his voice took on resonance. "But never have I seen one posted by a gentler hand. Walt, my boy, I feel sure that I speak for the entire company. We take this occasion to thank a fine road-manager." Our people gathered round, made brave murmurs. I think Mr. Fellowes meant to go on with a little speech, but seeing Walt's eyes he bit his lip and turned away.

At that moment the stage door swung open once more and Nell and John Colton came in together, from the snowy alley. Mr. Fellowes cleared his throat again, and with elaborate casualness the friendly knot of people broke up; singly and in pairs, without glancing back, they strolled towards the stairs leading down to the dressing rooms. We were used to seeing our leading man and woman together, by now.

They stood side by side, reading the telegram on the bulletin board. Above her starved-looking red fox neckpiece, Nell's face slowly became very still.

John smiled pleasantly at Walt: "I suppose you'll be going back to Chicago, to take out another road company."

"No, I'm fired," Walt said. "I got a telegram of my own."

"Oh, too bad. What rotten luck, old man."

"Yeah," Walt said.

John flushed painfully, and gulped, as if he wished too late that he were swallowing his words.

"Walt!" Nell's voice had a sort of deadened sharpness.

"Oh, well," Walt said.

They were both looking at him steadily, but Nell's eyes were grey as sleet. After a long minute, John Colton reached out for her hand. In that gesture there was the same quiet persistence which we had all sensed when we watched them sitting together in the trains, or talking in low voices in shadowy corners backstage.

"So you're broke now, Walt?" Nell said clearly. "You've come to the end?"

Walt didn't say anything. Perhaps he couldn't.

"Is all the big talk blown away, Walt? Are you still so sure of next year—always next year, always some other time?" A woman who has been put off and postponed has a right to be bitter, but this was terrible. This was what Nell had been thinking in her

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own empty nights. And now was her chance. "Is Broadway still so near?"

Then, for the second time that morning, a man was turning away from the silent look in Walt's eyes. "Nell!" John Colton said. "Don't! Please don't."

"So now it's my turn," Nell said in that awfully clear voice. "You've crashed, with all the hopes you held out to me, and all the promises from year to year. It's the end of the road. You haven't anything to say now, any more, have you, Walt? So now I'm taking charge." With an abrupt wrench, she pulled her hand away from John Colton's. "You're listening to me, now, Walt," she said. "We're going to be married this afternoon."

Suddenly both men were trying to talk, their voices grating against each other, trying to override each other, and Nell's voice no longer clear saying: "— go away, go away, I can't stand any more—"

And John Colton's hand on my arm. "Come along, youngster," he said. Because Nell was crying. Standing there before Walt, with tears streaming down over her lips.

Following John towards the basement stairs, I saw him stumble only once. It was when we heard Nell say one more bitter thing to Walt.

"I've had to wait for failure," she said. "You fool, you dear fool, I've been waiting for failure."

It was a lonely sort of wedding that afternoon, nothing like Walt had always planned. The company had been paid off; sitting at a bare wooden table on the stage with the local house-manager, a mean tobacco-stained fat man who had been authorized by wire, Walt had closed the accounts of that busted tour. Only John Colton did not appear.

They all took the afternoon train for Nashville, to scatter from there. We stayed in the theatre, labelling the company baggage for despatch to Chicago, and when that was done Walt and Nell and I walked to the courthouse. There was a park, with the snow in sunset and blue shadow-tracery of bare branches. A janitor was sweeping the corridor outside the county clerk's office. When we came out with the marriage licence, he put down his broom and came along to be a witness.

The courtroom was empty, but through an open inner door we saw the judge playing chess at his desk with a seedy loafer of great dignity. They were eating marshmallows out of a paper bag, those two old men. They arose when we came in, the judge fumbling with one hand to straighten his drooping black string tie; but his friend didn't have a tie. A confusion of introductions,

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of bows, of getting ourselves lined up in front of the judge, with the courthouse loafer standing very straight beside Walt and drawing down his scanty eyebrows with the importance of being the other witness . . . and then suddenly the dingy little back room was very quiet and the judge was looking slowly from Walt's face to Nell's with his faded fierce old eyes. To what he saw there he began to speak, with strange gentleness.

The hotel in that town was so bad that theatrical companies coming through had always stayed in boarding-houses. That night after supper the three of us were in Nell's room. She was wandering vaguely about; her pale beauty burned in the deep shadows of that heavy dark room, with its worn red carpet and curtains, its massive dented Victorian furniture. Walt sat slumped in a chair by the lamplit table. I remember the table had a mothy red velvet cloth with gold tassels at the corners, and the globe of the lamp was hand painted with lilies. I was leaning against the door, ready to say good night. Nell said:

"Where are we going from here, Walt? Are we going to try Broadway again?"

"I've . . . I've been thinking," Walt mumbled.

"You know how much money I have saved up," Nell said. "If we were careful we could live seven or eight weeks in New York. In that time, surely one of us could find something." She smiled in my direction, including me, and that was the first time I actually realized that the three of us were a family.

And suddenly, unexpectedly, we saw Walt's final surrender to the bleak daylight realities of this world. He buried his face in his hands. "We're not good enough, baby, we're not good enough," he said.

"I've known it for a long time," Nell said coolly. "I've known it every time I've played a scene with John Colton. I've been travelling above myself, I've known I could never keep up with him. It's you and me, now, Walt."

"At least we're not fooling ourselves any more," Walt muttered dully. "We'll never make Broadway. We haven't got it, kid."

That awful wrench of confession, coming through spread fingers which hid his face—and then my aunt Nell swiftly kneeling beside his chair. "My dear, my own, I'd rather be poor with you," she whispered. "That's always been the trouble."

"If we went to New York the money would melt away and we'd still be pounding the sidewalks," Walt said, and dropped his hands to find hers. "Listen. I've got a living to make for you both, and I know some fellows who have a chain of cinemas on the West Coast. They'll give me a job as house-manager somewhere —head usher in a tuxedo," he said with a ghost of his old grin.

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"I wanted to offer you fortune, baby, but we'll settle for a little home in the suburbs. And we'll send Jim to college, out there in the west. What do you want to study, Jim?"

"Drama," I said.

"Right, boy, it's yours," Walt said. "You're going to have your chance."

"With our love, Jim darling," Nell said softly. "If we have failed, we've still tried hard, and we've believed. Your race is still to be run."

Gruffly, cheerfully, Walt said, "Well, the old stage door is closed for us, baby—the dirtiest, most beautiful door in the world. I'm wiring the head office of that cinema chain in the morning."

I couldn't look at them any more. On the dressing table that absurd stage-diamond ring glittered faintly.

I left them there in their room of crimson plush and shadows, and walked down the street towards the boarding-house where Walt and I had been staying. In that walk of starlight and snow I was thinking of the future—the brave, the shiningly intact future of youth, not yet worm-eaten by the doubts, the mealy drawbacks of the adult mind. That night I did not know enough to foresee the years ahead for my uncle Walt and my aunt Nell: their years of silent and concealed sacrifice to give me the chance they had never had. In those college years I helped all I could, I worked in Walt's local cinema, ushering, doing the odd jobs. But I have seen him grey and drawn and thin, and no holiday. I have seen him hollow eyed with fear over curt letters about the attendance figures; and I saw my aunt Nell fading gently older. They even sent me to Germany for two years, to study in the ultra-modern theatre. I don't know what they went without, to do that. They already had so little, and Walt had been transferred to an even poorer neighbourhood . . .

So that afternoon last August, in the empty theatre on West Forty-seventh Street, I was thinking of my uncle Walt. And while my wife and my boss, the brilliant and beloved people of my grownup years, were talking about abandoning that play, *The Years of Burden*, I suppose I was thinking hard . . .

I thought, if my uncle Walt could carry what he had carried, in poverty and weariness, what was I doing, sitting here without speaking while Elizabeth and Al excused my failure, talking backwards and forwards across me? With our modern facilities of the theatre, with the best casting that New York could give me, what right had I to give up? To give up something I believed in?

Certainly, it was a difficult play. All fine and beautiful and

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truthful things are difficult. The hands often fall away, the heart often falters.

The stage was empty. The men and women had drifted off, discouraged.

"Bring them back," I said harshly. "We're going to work."

Al crushed out his dead cigar, and gave me a long, peaceful look.

"Who says so, Jim?" he asked.

"The manager of a local cinema in Seattle," I said.

They both looked at me, there in the half-darkness, as if they thought I had gone crazy. But Elizabeth said:

"All right, Jim. We'll try again, for you."

Well, we worked. We worked. For long hot weeks, into the autumn, and we opened in Providence for the tryout.

At the end of the second act, with the house roaring, Elizabeth shot me a quick, scared glance from the footlights; and Al was suddenly standing beside me in the wings. His hand was on my shoulder, and I think he sighed. New York was ahead.

With the curtain coming slowly down on the great thunder of victory, Elizabeth came off the stage, to me.

"Jim!" she said. "Jim!" She was half-laughing, but with tears making courses down the powder on her cheeks. "You've done it, Jim! You drove us without mercy, almost to death—we nearly hated you—but look what we've got! Darling—oh darling, and we were near failure!"

Wearily, wearily—now it was my turn to be tired, almost unto death, when our people gathering round were triumphant and lifted and gay—with heavy empty hands I stood there.

Al has a deep human wisdom, a little sad. Quietly, he said: "The guy in Seattle—does he know what he's made us do? Does he know what he's bringing in to Broadway?"

"Not yet," I said. "But Elizabeth, my dear, here's something his wife sent to you. For opening night."

And with the roar of the great world still coming through the motionless curtain, I handed her, out of my vest pocket, Ellen Terry's diamond ring.

* * *

DUAL CONTROL

From behind the hedge of the institution grounds came solemn voices. "I have decided to conquer Britain," announced one. "Historians will never be able to say that Julius Caesar rested on his laurels."

"Britain, hey?" mused the other. "Well, Julius, if I were you—and incidentally, I am . . ."

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TIME PIECE

He was a man you couldn't help liking—unless, of course, you knew him

by VICTOR CANNING

YOU could tell it was coming. The touch, the hard-luck story and, because my own glass was full and his empty, my own suit reasonably respectable and his unreasonably shabby, I was sorry for him.

A man's always wondering at such times if he may not come to it himself. Twenty more years and I would have reached his sixty-odd, and a lot can happen in twenty years.

He edged along the seat a little and leaned across the table. From his waistcoat pocket he pulled out a watch and laid it between us. It was a good watch, silver, and with those finely wrought gold hands that they don't put on watches these days.

"It's yours for a couple of quid. Nothing wrong with it and honestly come by."

You could tell he was an old hand at the game by the way he ignored the preliminaries and came right to the heart of the problem at once.

"I don't want it," I said, but because a man's money is his own and he's entitled to be a damned fool with it at times, I passed over a ten-bob note as I pushed the watch back.

While he was recovering from the shock I ordered a beer and a ham sandwich for him from the bar.

"I'd rather you just bought the watch," he said when the attendant had served him.

"Forget it," I said.

He took a sip of the beer to help him, but it had the opposite effect.

"I hate the sight of watches," he said suddenly, like a man remembering something he'd forgotten. "They started it all."

"All what?"

"This." He flicked his hand across the front of his shabby suit and bit into his sandwich.

I had half an hour before an appointment, and it was raining outside. He had me, and from the slick way he slid into his routine I knew there was to be no escape.

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"Chris Selby was his name," the old man said. "A London theatrical agent, who handled quite a few head-of-the-bill names and a great many more nearly as good. Yes, he was doing well for himself was Chris Selby, but he could never resist the temptation to do a little better—even if it meant going outside his own line of business."

He went into the story easily, and you could tell he'd had a lot of practice.

The whole thing took place just after the 1914-18 war—a long time ago, but there are a lot of people who still remember it and who think the Twenties were a pretty good period to live in.

This Chris Selby, it seems, was a Prince Charming with a smile that came on and off like the summer lightning, a voice like butter when he wanted something from you and poison if you got in the way of his fifteen per cent. But on the whole few people did get in his way, and most people liked him because they didn't really know him.

He used to make five or six trips a year to Paris on business, picking up acts and vaudeville turns, trying out his smile along the Champs-Élysées and never feeling lonely in the evenings or counting his francs to see if he had enough for another Pernod.

Twice a year he would take his car over.

He always went over from Dover to Calais and back that way, and most of the Customs boys knew and liked him because on a ten-minute acquaintance five or six times a year he was the kind of man anyone would like, and also he was generous with complimentary tickets for the London shows.

He never had any trouble with the Customs, and the truth was that, except for the two car trips each year, there was never any need for trouble because he never tried to get away with anything. But when the car went over—that was different. Twice a year he used to bring back about ten thousand watches.

I know it sounds a lot, but it's surprising how many watches you can pack into a car, particularly if your twelve-gallon tank only holds two gallons of petrol and the rest watches, and the floor of the car is a false one. Of course, it means filling up with petrol pretty often, but no one minds that if the gross profit on each trip touches two thousand pounds.

If you or I tried anything like that we'd be as nervous as kittens with a duck for a foster mother and probably give ourselves away. But not Chris Selby. A theatrical agency is pretty stiff training in putting up a good front. He never felt nervous and he knew his stuff.

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Now, that November, so my friend told me, Chris Selby set off from London in his car feeling angry. He wasn't nervous or worried about the watches he was going to bring back; he was just looking forward to seeing the man who supplied him with them in Paris.

There had been certain aspects of the batch he'd taken back in the previous July which had annoyed him and made the trip less profitable than it should have been.

As he drove into the sheds at Dover he showed none of this. He put on his usual agreeable air, handed out a bunch of complimentaries for a new show in town, and in a couple of hours was driving out of Calais on the Paris road, perfectly composed and his anger under control.

In Paris he put up at the Hotel Balzac and that evening he went round to see his supplier. This was a modest little jeweller in the Avenue Wagram called Monsieur Audiat.

Monsieur Audiat was careful as well as modest. Chris Selby was his only customer for this kind of work, and he was content with a regular twice-a-year profit rather than more constant business with the risk of publicity.

The day before Chris Selby was due to go home he would leave his car overnight in the garage at the back of the shop and Monsieur Audiat—with the help of his odd-job man, a rather stupid youth—would have the watches all packed away in the car by the next morning.

Chris Selby found Audiat and the lad at the back of the shop and, without wasting time on polite enquiries about their health and with the smile turned off and the butter in his voice gone rancid, he let them have it.

A thousand of the last batch of watches had been duds, most of the others hadn't come up to specification, and the whole lot had been so badly packed into his car that many of them had been broken.

He embroidered on this theme for about fifteen minutes, slipping in frequent references to the personalities of Audiat and his lad, their parents and the general perfidious nature of the French people as a whole. It was the kind of performance he was rather good at.

In the end Audiat could have gladly stuck a knife into his heart—if it hadn't been for the fact that no Frenchman willingly destroys the source of a nice little profit—and even the half-witted youth got the idea that the *anglais* was angry because he hadn't had watches that worked, as well as looked good. However, Audiat finally explained that the batch of watches had been bought by him from Switzerland and he had packed them unexamined into the

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car and, when Selby quieted down, he promised that there should be no trouble with the next batch, which was arriving the following day.

But the next day the watches hadn't arrived. Nor had they arrived the morning of the day after that when Selby drove his car round.

Now Selby had hoped the watches would arrive that morning so they could be packed in time for him to make Calais for the last ferry that night. He wanted to be in London the following day for the opening of a new show in which he had an interest. To show how he felt about things Selby examined the genealogy of the Audiat *ménage* again and swore that if the watches didn't come in time he'd take his business elsewhere in future.

He spent the day clearing up a little unfinished business with a fan and dove dancer he felt he could promote professionally and privately in London, telephoning Audiat now and then to see if the watches had come in.

At nine o'clock that evening when he telephoned he learned that the watches had just arrived. He left the dancer to feed her doves and whipped around to Audiat.

He told him exactly how he wanted the watches packed and Audiat promised that his lad should examine them all and see there were no duds and that the car could be picked up at four in in the morning, which would give Selby time to drive to Calais and take the early morning ferry. He'd be in London after lunch and see his new show that evening.

Just after four in the morning he was away, singing to himself, driving fast and practising his smile on the women at the level-crossing gates. When it was a matter of practice, Selby didn't mind what kind of woman it was.

At Calais it was a raw cold morning and he had no trouble with the French Customs. He saw his car aboard and then went down to the bar and had a coffee laced with brandy. Most of the way over he dozed.

At Dover he went ashore and saw his cases through, telling the officer who was examining them not to be surprised if he shook out any feathers or corn because he had just booked up a fan and dove dancer. Then he went over to clear his car.

The Customs officer on the car was one he knew well, a man about his own age. He gave him the big smile, cracked the feathers and corn joke again, and answered the usual questions. Everything went well, the smile, the joke, the easy manner and the promise of a free seat at the new show if the officer liked to write and remind him some time.

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He'd got the all-clear signal and had his hand on the car door, and was about to get in and drive off when all over the place there was a mad wail of sirens for a few seconds and then everything stopped.

Chris Selby didn't have to be told what it was. In those days the First World War wasn't far behind and when the sirens went at eleven o'clock on Armistice Day everybody stopped and there was silence for two minutes. There really was silence. Even the sea-gulls stopped bawling their heads off. Chris Selby and the officer stood by the car like wax figures and you could have heard a pin drop.

No-one did drop a pin, but Chris and the officer heard something else. From the car, not loud enough for anyone else to hear, it's true, but loud enough to do the damage, came the gentle sound of ten thousand watches ticking away, all carefully wound by the stupid French lad who wanted to please the *anglais* by making sure that he had watches which were in working order as well as looking good . . .

It was here that my friend stopped his story to finish his ham sandwich and beer.

I'd had my ten-bob's worth, all right. But there's always something that drives a man on to get a little more for his money, and I said : " Now tell me that you're Chris Selby and maybe I'll buy the watch for a couple of quid."

But the old boy shook his head. " Selby died years ago. No, I'm the Customs officer. With his smile and his ten-minute charm he talked me into a partnership—and two years later we were both caught."

* * *

OPEN VERDICT

A spinster lady, self-appointed supervisor of village morals, accused a workman of having reverted to drink because " with her own eyes " she had seen his wheelbarrow standing outside a public house.

The accused made no defence, but that evening placed his wheelbarrow outside her door and left it there all night.

Told in *The Countryman*

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POINT OF VIEW

THE pleasantest part of a man's life is generally that which passes in courtship, provided his passion be sincere and the party beloved kind with discretion. JOSEPH ADDISON

Oh, my young friends, how delightful is the beginning of a love business, and how undignified sometimes the end.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

Love is the most subtle form of self-interest.

HOLBROOK JACKSON

We cannot live by Freud alone.

CHRISTOPHER FRY

BETWEEN a woman's 'Yes' and 'Nay' I would not engage to put a pin's point, so close they be to one another.

CERVANTES

The sort of person I like is a modest woman, who stays at home and looks after her husband's dinner. THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

He married an Anglo-Indian widow, and soon after published a pamphlet in favour of suttee.

GEORGE MEREDITH

MARRIAGE is not like the hill Olympus, wholly clear, without clouds; yea, expect both wind and storm sometimes, which, when blown over, the air is clearer and wholesomer for it.

THOMAS FULLER

Love in marriage cannot live nor subscribe unless it be mutual; and where love cannot be, there can be left of wedlock nothing but the empty husk of an outside matrimony, as undelightful and unpleasing to God as any other kind of hypocrisy.

JOHN MILTON

They that have grown old in a single state are generally found to be morose, fretful and captious. DR. JOHNSON

IS not marriage an open question, when it is alleged, from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution want to get out; and such as are out want to get in. R. W. EMERSON

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A fat woman is a quilt for the winter.

Punjabi Proverb

IT is human, when we do not understand another human being, and cannot ignore him, to exert an unconscious pressure on that person to turn him into something that we *can* understand: many husbands and wives exert this pressure on each other.

T. S. ELIOT

Marriage, which makes two one, is a lifelong struggle to discover which is that one. *Author Unknown*

I expect that woman will be the last thing civilised by man. GEORGE MEREDITH

MARRIAGE is the earliest fruit of civilization and it will be the latest. I think a man and a woman should choose each other for life, for the simple reason that a long life with all its accidents is barely long enough for a man and a woman to understand each other; and in this case to understand is to love. The man who understands one woman is qualified to understand pretty well anything.

JOHN BUTLER YEATS

His wife might not be a clever woman, but she was a cosy woman, and there was a lot to be said for cosiness in this very uncosy world.

J. B. PRIESTLEY

Some modern pathologists hold that love is an intoxication of the nervous system. *Author Unknown*

ON the way to Aarhus, I saw a very comical sight. Two cows, which were tied together, cantered past us; the one was gaddish, and had a swing of genius about its tail; the other, as it appeared, was more prosaic, and was depressed at having to take part in the same movements. Do not most marriages turn out to be like that?

SÖREN KIERKEGAARD

My husband will never chase another woman. He's too fine, too decent, too old.

GRACIE ALLEN

A lover who reasons is no lover.

NORMAN DOUGLAS

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If a woman has had more than three husbands, she poisons them ; avoid her. WILLIAM MAGUIRE

THE great secret of successful marriage is to treat all disasters as incidents and none of the incidents as disasters.

HAROLD NICOLSON

The greatest charm of marriage, in fact that which renders it irresistible to those who have once tasted it, is the duologue, the permanent conversation between two people which talks over everything and everyone till death breaks the record.

CYRIL CONNOLLY

That is the nature of women, not to love when we love them, and to love when we love them not. CERVANTES

If you wish women to love you, be original ; I know a man who used to wear felt boots summer and winter, and women fell in love with him. TCHEKHOV

A WIFE is to thank God her Husband hath faults . . . A Husband without faults is a dangerous observer. LORD HALIFAX

It destroys one's nerves to be amiable every day to the same human being. BENJAMIN DISRAELI

Charles Dickens had the supreme character of the domestic despot—that his good temper was, if possible, more despotic than his bad temper. G. K. CHESTERTON

I OFTEN think that women, even those who think themselves experienced in sexual strategy, do not know how to manage an honest man. THOMAS HARDY

Mr. Bennet treated the matter differently. " So, Lizzy," said he one day, " your sister is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and gives her a sort of distinction among her companions." JANE AUSTEN

I should like to see any kind of a man, distinguishable from a gorilla, that some good and even pretty woman could not shape a husband out of. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures.

DR. JOHNSON

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ONE WHO WAITS

How can I tell you what I am when even I don't know?

by RAY BRADBURY

I LIVE in a well. I live like smoke in the well. Like vapour in a stone throat. I don't move. I don't do anything but wait. Overhead, I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when I don't know? I cannot. I am simply waiting. I am mist and moonlight and memory. I am sad and I am old. Sometimes I fall like rain into the well. Spider webs are startled into forming where my rain falls fast, on the water surface. I wait in cool silence and there will be a day when I no longer wait.

Now it is morning. I hear a great thunder. I smell red fire from a distance. I hear metal crashing. I wait. I listen.

Voices. Far away.

"All right!"

One voice. An alien voice. An alien tongue I cannot know. No word is familiar. I listen.

"Send the men out!" A crunching in crystal sands.

"So this is Mars!"

"Where's the flag?"

"Here you are, sir."

"Good, good."

The sun is high in the blue sky and its golden rays fill the well and I hang like a flower pollen, invisible and misting in the warm light.

Voices. "In the name of the Government of Earth, I proclaim this to be the Martian Territory, to be equally divided among the member nations."

"Amen."

What are they saying? I turn in the sun, like a wheel, invisible and lazy, golden and tireless.

"What's over here?"

"A well!"

"No!"

"Come on and see."

The approach of warmth. Three objects bend over the well mouth and my coolness rises to the objects.

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" Good ! "

" Think it's good water ? "

" We'll see."

" Someone get a bucket."

A sound of running. The return.

" Here we are."

I wait.

" Let it down on the rope. Easy."

The water ripples softly as the bucket touches and fills. I rise in the warm air towards the well mouth.

" Here we are. You want to test this water, Regent ? "

" Let's have it."

" What a beautiful well. Look at that construction. How old d'you think it is ? "

" God knows. When we landed in that other town yesterday Smith said there hasn't been life on Mars in ten thousand years."

" How is it, Regent ? The water."

" Pure as silver. Have a glass."

The sound of water in the hot sunlight. Now I hover like a dust, a cinnamon, upon the soft wind.

" What's the matter, Jones ? "

" I don't know. Got a terrific headache. All of a sudden."

" Did you drink the water yet ? "

" No, I haven't. It's not that. I was just bending over the well and all of a sudden, my head split. I feel better now."

Now I know who I am.

My name is Stephen Leonard Jones and I am twenty-three years old and I have just come in a rocket from a planet called Earth and I am standing with my good friends Regent and Shaw by an old well on the planet Mars.

I look down at my golden fingers, tanned and strong. I look at my long legs and at my silver uniform and at my friends.

" What's wrong, Jones ? " they say.

" Nothing," I say, looking at them. " Nothing at all."

The food is good. It has been ten thousand years since food. It touches the tongue in a fine way and the wine with the food is warming. I listen to the sound of voices. I make words that I do not understand but somehow understand. I test the air.

" What's the matter, Jones ? "

I tilt this head of mine and rest my hands holding the silver utensils of eating. I feel everything.

" What do you mean ? " this voice, this new thing of mine, says.

" You keep breathing funny. Coughing," says the other one.

I pronounce exactly. " Maybe a little cold coming on."

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" Check with the doctor later."

I nod my head and it is good to nod. It is good to do several things after ten thousand years. It is good to breathe the air and it is good to feel the sun in the flesh deep and going deeper and it is good to feel the structure of ivory, the fine skeleton hidden in the warming flesh, and it is good to hear sounds much clearer and more immediate than they were in the stone deepness of a well. I sit enchanted.

" Come out of it, Jones. Snap it. We've got to move ! "

" Yes," I say, hypnotized with the way the word forms like water on the tongue and falls with slow beauty out into the air.

I walk and it is good walking. I stand high and it is a long way to the ground when I look down from my eyes and my head. It is like living on a fine cliff and being happy there.

Regent stands by the stone wall, looking down. The others have gone murmuring to the silver ship from which they came.

I feel the fingers of my hand and the smile of my mouth.

" It is deep," I say.

" Yes."

" It is called a Soul Well."

Regent raises his head and looks at me. " How do you know ? "

" Doesn't it look like one ? "

" I never heard of a Soul Well."

" A place where waiting things, things that once had flesh, wait and wait," I say, touching his arm.

The sand is fire and the ship is silver fire in the hotness of the day and the heat is good to feel. The sound of my feet in the hard sand. I listen. The sound of the wind and the sun burning the valleys. I smell the smell of the rocket boiling in the noon. I stand below the port.

" Where's Regent ? " someone says.

" I saw him by the well," I reply.

One of them runs towards the well. I am beginning to tremble. A fine shivering tremble, hidden deep, but becoming very strong. And for the first time I hear it, as if it, too, were hidden in a well. A voice calling deep within me, tiny and afraid. And the voice cries, " Let me go, let me go," and there is a feeling as if something was trying to get free, a pounding of labyrinthine doors, a rushing down dark corridors and up passages, echoing and screaming.

" Regent's in the well ! "

The men are running, all five of them. I run with them but now I am sick and the trembling is violent.

" He must have fallen. Jones, you were here with him. Did you see ? Jones ? Well speak up, man."

" What's wrong, Jones ? "

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I fall to my knees, the trembling is so bad.

" He's sick. Here, help me with him."

" The sun."

" No, not the sun," I murmur.

They stretch me out and the seizures come and go like earthquakes and the deep hidden voice in me cries : " This is Jones, this is *me*, that's not him, that's not him, don't believe him, let me out, let me out ! " And I look up at the bent figures and my eyelids flicker. They touch my wrists.

" His heart is playing up."

I close my eyes. The screaming stops. The shivering ceases.

I rise, as in a cool well, released.

" He's dead," says someone.

" Jones is dead."

" From what ? "

" Shock it looks like."

" What kind of shock ? " I say, and my name is Sessions and my lips move crisply, and I am the captain of these men. I stand among them and I am looking down at a body which lies on the sands. I clap both hands to my head.

" Captain ! "

" It's nothing," I say, crying out. " Just a headache. I'll be all right. There. There," I whisper. " It's all right now."

" We'd better get out of the sun, sir."

" Yes," I say, looking down at Jones. " We should never have come. Mars doesn't want us."

We carry the body back to the rocket with us, and a new voice is calling deep in me to be let out.

" Help, help." Far down in the moist earthenworks of the body. " Help, help ! " in red fathoms, echoing and pleading. The trembling starts much sooner this time. The control is less steady.

" Captain, you'd better get in out of the sun, you don't look too well, sir."

" Yes," I say. " Help," I say.

" What, sir ? "

" I didn't say anything."

" You said, ' Help,' sir."

" Did I, Mathews, did I ? "

The body is laid out in the shadow of the rocket and the voice screams in the deep underwater catacombs of bone and crimson tide. My hands jerk. My mouth splits and is parched. My nostrils fasten wide. My eyes roll. Help, help, oh help, don't, don't, let me out, don't, don't.

" Don't," I say.

" What, sir ? "

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" Never mind," I say. " I've got to get free," I say. I clap my hand to my mouth.

" What's that, sir? " cries Mathews.

" Get inside, all of you, go back to Earth ! " I shout.

A gun is in my hand. I lift it.

" Don't, sir ! "

An explosion. Shadows run. The screaming is cut off. There is a whistling sound of falling through space. After ten thousand years, how good to die. How good to feel the sudden coolness, the relaxation. How good to be like a hand within a glove that stretches out and grows wonderfully cold in the hot sand. Oh, the quiet and the loveliness of gathering, darkening death. But one cannot linger on.

A crack, a snap.

" Good God, he's killed himself ! " I cry, and open my eyes and there is the captain lying against the rocket, his skull split by a bullet, his eyes wide, his tongue protruding between his white teeth. Blood runs from his head. I bend to him and touch him. " The fool," I say. " Why did he do that ? "

The men are horrified. They stand over the two dead men and turn their heads to see the Martian sands and the distant well where Regent lies rolling in deep waters. A croaking comes out of their dry lips, a whimpering, a childish protest against this awful dream.

The men turn to me. After a long while, one of them says. " That makes you captain, Mathews."

" I know," I say slowly.

" Only six of us left."

" Good God, it happened so quick ! "

" I don't want to stay here, let's get away ! "

The men clamour. I go to them and touch them now, with a confidence which almost sings in me. " Listen," I say, and touch their elbows or their arms or their hands.

We all fall silent.

We are one.

No, no, no, no, no, no ! Inner voices crying, deep down and gone into prisons beneath exteriors.

We are looking at each other. We are Samuel Mathews and Raymond Moses and William Spaulding and Charles Evans and Forrest Cole and John Summers, and we say nothing but look upon each other and our white faces and shaking hands.

We turn, as one, and look at the well.

" Now," we say. No, no, six voices scream, hidden and layered down and stored forever.

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Our feet walk in the sand and it is as if a great hand with twelve fingers was moving across the hot sea bottom.

We bend to the well, looking down. From the cool depths six faces peer back up at us.

One by one we bend until our balances are gone; and one by one drop into the mouth and down through cool darkness into the cold waters.

The sun sets. The stars wheel upon the night sky. Far out, there is a wink of light. Another rocket coming, leaving red marks on space.

I live in a well. I live like smoke in a well. Like vapour in a stone throat. Overhead, I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when even I don't know? I cannot.

I am simply waiting.

* * *

ANSWERS to IT'S MY PROFESSION, on page 16

1. *The lark in the traditional ballad "The Death and Burial of Cock Robbin."*
2. *Lord Peter Wimsey in "Busman's Honeymoon" by Dorothy L. Sayers.*
3. *Charles Rainier in "Random Harvest" by James Hilton.*
4. *The betrayer in "She was poor, but she was honest . . ." Author unknown.*
5. *Commodore Hornblower in "The Commodore" by C. S. Forester.*
6. *The British Grenadiers in the traditional song.*
7. *Viola, disguised as Cesario, in "Twelfth Night" by William Shakespeare.*
8. *Mrs. Higden in "Our Mutual Friend" by Charles Dickens.*
9. *Gareth in "Gareth and Lynette" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Wrests. 4, Spared. 10, Volunteer. 11, Naive. 12, Tractor drivers. 13, Best suit. 15, Enter. 17, Adder. 19, Ironside. 21, Fashion parades. 24, Arena. 25, Religions. 26, Ladled. 27, Orator.

Down. 1, Wave. 2, Enlarge. 3, Tunic. 5. Penniless. 6, Raiment. 7, Dressers. 8, Revolutionary. 9, Traditionally. 14, Terminate. 16, Taffrail. 18, Descend. 20, Died out. 22, Anger. 23, User.

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★*" You'll never learn," wrote Alphonse Daudet to his friend, the poet Gringoire. " Here you are, offered a reporter's job on one of the leading Paris papers, and you turn it down . . . Look at your ragged coat ! Look at your hungry face ! That's where writing poetry has got you ! Very well, then, listen to the story of Monsieur Seguin's goat and you'll learn what they get who are determined to be free ! "*

MONSIEUR SEGUIN'S GOAT

A Story with a Moral

by ALPHONSE DAUDET

MONSIEUR SEGUIN never had any luck with his goats. He always lost them, and always in the same way: on a fine morning they would break their tethers, run away up into the mountains, and up there the wolf would eat them. Nothing could stop them, neither their master's kindness nor their fear of the wolf. You might describe them as independent goats, who wanted wide-open spaces and pastures new more than anything else.

Good Monsieur Seguin was most perplexed. He simply could not understand the nature of the animals. " It's no good," he said. " My goats aren't happy with me. I shall never keep one."

But he did not give up hope, and after losing six goats, all in the same way, he bought a seventh. But this time he took care to buy it very young, to give it more time to get accustomed to living with him.

Ah, what a pretty little thing she was, Monsieur Seguin's goat ! She had the gentlest eyes, a petty officer's beard, shiny black hoofs, striped horns, and long white hair like an overcoat. And then she was so affectionate and docile ; she let herself be milked without moving and without putting her feet into the pail.

Behind Monsieur Seguin's house was a paddock surrounded by hawthorn hedges, and he put his new guest there. He tied her to a stake in the choicest part of the meadow, taking care to give her plenty of rope. He kept coming out to see whether she was all right. The goat was very happy and grazed away with such relish that Monsieur Seguin was enraptured.

" At last ! " he thought (poor man). " At last I've got a goat who is happy with me ! "

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Monsieur Seguin was wrong. His little goat grew bored.

One day she looked up at the mountains and said to herself:

"How good it must be up there! What fun to dance about in the heather, without this horrible halter rubbing the skin off my neck. It's all very well for donkeys and cows, but goats need open spaces."

From that moment the grass in the paddock lost its savour. The little goat grew thin and lifeless and her milk became scanty. It wrung your heart to see her dragging her halter all day long, bleating piteously, her head turned towards the mountains and her nostrils distended.

Monsieur Seguin saw that something was wrong with his goat, but did not know what it could be.

One morning, as he had just finished milking her, she turned round and spoke to him in her *patois*: "Listen, Monsieur Seguin. I'm pining away here. Let me go up into the mountains!"

"Oh, God, you too!" cried Monsieur Seguin, dropping his bucket in amazement. Then he sat down in the grass beside her.

"Blanquette, do you really want to leave me?"

And Blanquette answered: "Yes, Monsieur Seguin."

"Isn't there enough grass for you here?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Seguin."

"Perhaps I've tied you too close to the stake—let me give you some more rope."

"It isn't worth the trouble, Monsieur Seguin."

"Then what *can* I do for you? What is it you want?"

"I want to go up into the mountains, Monsieur Seguin."

"But, you poor thing, you don't realize there's a wolf up there. What will you do when you meet him?"

"I shall butt him with my horns, Monsieur Seguin."

"The wolf wouldn't worry about your horns. He has eaten nanny-goats with much bigger ones than yours. You remember poor old Renaude, last year? She was a super-goat. As strong and as wilful as a billy. She fought with the wolf all night, but in the morning he ate her."

"Oh, dear! Poor Renaude! But it doesn't make any difference. Please let me go up into the mountains, Monsieur Seguin."

"Heaven protect me!" said Monsieur Seguin. "What is it that comes over all my goats? Here's another one I'm about to lose. Well, I won't! I'll save you in spite of yourself, you little good-for-nothing, and in case you should break your rope I'm going to shut you up in the stable and there you'll stop!"

Thereupon Monsieur Seguin carried the goat into the dark stable and turned the key twice in the lock. Unfortunately he forgot about the window and scarcely was his back turned when the goat jumped out and scurried away.

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You're laughing ? I daresay you are ; you're taking the goat's side against me. But we'll see whether you laugh by-and-by.

When the little white goat arrived up in the mountains there was general rejoicing. Never had the old pine-trees seen anything so pretty. She was received like a queen. The chestnut trees bent down to caress her with the tips of their branches. The golden broom opened out as she went by and tried to be extra fragrant. All the mountain put out flags for her.

You can imagine how happy our goat was. No more rope, no more stake. Nothing to stop her frisking about and grazing just as she pleased. And what grass ! It grew right up over her horns ! Fine, tasty, delicate as lace, and such thousands of varieties ! It was a very different thing from the grass in the paddock. And then the flowers ! Great blue bellflowers, purple foxgloves, a whole forest of wild flowers overflowing with intoxicating juices.

Half drunk, the white goat lay on her back and revelled ; she rolled down the grassy banks pell-mell with the fallen leaves and the chestnuts. Then she sprang to her feet again and hop ! she was off headlong through the bushes and the undergrowth, now high on a peak, now deep in a gully, up and down, all over the place ! It was as though there were ten of Monsieur Seguin's goats in the mountains. Blanquette was afraid of nothing.

She leapt over wide torrents which splashed her with spray. Then she lay down dripping wet on a flat rock and dried herself in the sun. Once, as she advanced along the edge of a plateau, she caught sight of Monsieur Seguin's house down in the plain with the paddock behind it. That made her laugh till she cried.

" How small it is ! " she said. " However did I manage to bear it down there ? " Poor little thing ! At that height she thought she was at least as big as the world.

In short, it was a great day for Monsieur Seguin's goat. Towards noon, as she raced about, she ran across a herd of chamois who were busy nibbling a wild grape-vine. With them our little white-coated wanderer was a sensation. They gave her the best place at the feast and the gentlemen were all most gallant.

Confidentially, it even seems that a young black chamois had the good fortune to please Blanquette. The two lovers lingered in the woods for an hour or two, and if you want to know what they said to one another, go and ask the babbling brooks that trickle unseen beneath the moss.

Suddenly the wind grew chilly. Violet shadows closed in on the mountain. It was evening.

" Already ? " said the little goat. She stood still in astonishment.

Down below, the mists gathered, drowning the fields. Monsieur Seguin's paddock disappeared and all that could be seen of his house

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was the roof, with a wisp of smoke above it. She listened to the bells of a flock on its way back to the fold, and she was suddenly sad . . . A falcon, flying home, brushed her with its wings. She shivered. And it was then that she heard a howling in the mountains.

She remembered the wolf; all the day long in her folly she had not given him a thought.

At this moment a trumpet sounded down in the valley. It was the good Monsieur Seguin making a last attempt.

"Ooo, ooo!" went the wolf.

"Come back, come back!" went the trumpet.

Blanquette longed to go back. Then she thought of the rope, the stake, the hedges. How could she possibly endure that life again now? Surely it was better to stay where she was?

The leaves rustled behind her. She turned, and in the dark she saw two small ears sticking up and two gleaming eyes. It was the wolf. Enormous, he sat there quite still on his haunches watching the little goat greedily, as though enjoying the taste of her in advance. He was in no hurry—he was quite sure he would eat her sooner or later, but now, as she turned round, he gave a sinister laugh.

"Ha, ha! Monsieur Seguin's little goat!" And he passed his great red tongue over his chops.

Blanquette knew she was lost. She recalled the story of old Renaude, who had fought all through the night only to be eaten in the morning, and told herself that she might do better to let him eat her right away. But, no, she took up a defensive position with her head down and horns thrust forward. Not that she had any hope of killing the wolf—goats do not kill wolves—but she wanted to see if she could hold out as long as Renaude had done.

Now the monster took a step forward and the little horns started to dance. Ah, the plucky little goat! How she fought! More than ten times—I'm not lying—she forced the wolf to retreat to get his breath. During these brief respites the greedy little goat hurriedly snatched a blade more of her beloved grass. Then with her mouth full she turned to meet the renewed attack. It went on all night. From time to time she looked up and saw the stars dancing in the limpid sky.

"If only I too can hold out till dawn," she said to herself. One by one the stars faded. Blanquette thrust still harder with her horns. The wolf snapped his jaws with redoubled fury. A pale light appeared on the horizon. The hoarse crowing of a cock sounded from a farm in the valley.

"At last!" said the poor creature, who was only waiting for daybreak in order to die. She lay down, her beautiful white fur all stained with blood . . .

Then the wolf leapt upon the little white goat and ate her up.

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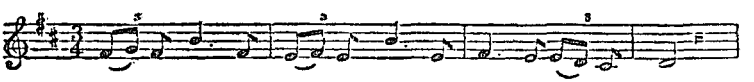
★*We hardly associate the name of George Bernard Shaw with the short story, although it was, in fact, a short story that began his brilliant career. "I vaguely remember," he tells us, "that when I was a boy I concocted a short story and sent it to some boys' journal. It was about a man with a gun attacking another man in the Glen of the Downs. The gun was the centre of interest to me . . ." By the time he wrote this story about a man with a horn—in 1885—his lively interest in the human factor had obviously asserted itself!*

SERENADE

by GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



I CELEBRATED my fortieth birthday by one of the amateur theatrical performances for which my house at Beckenham is famous. The piece, written, as usual, by myself, was a fairy play in three acts; and the plot turned upon the possession of a magic horn by the hero, a young Persian prince. My works are so well known that it is unnecessary to describe the action minutely. I need only remind the reader that an important feature in the second act is the interruption of a festival by the sound of the horn, blown by the Prince in the heart of a loadstone mountain in which he has been entombed by a malignant fairy. I had engaged a cornist from the band of my regiment to blow the horn; and it was arranged that he should place himself, not upon the stage, but downstairs in the hall, so that the required effect of extreme distance should be produced.

The entertainment began pleasantly. Some natural disappointment was felt when it became known that I was not to act; but my guests excused me with perfect good humour when I pleaded my double duty as host and stage manager. The best seat in the auditorium was occupied by the beautiful Linda Fitznightingale. The next chair, which I had intended for myself, had been taken (rather coolly) by Porcharlester of the 12th, a young man of amiable disposition, and of some musical talent, which enables him to make the most of a somewhat effeminate baritone voice which he is weak enough to put forward as a tenor.

As Linda's taste for music approached fanaticism, Porcharlester's

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single accomplishment gave him, in her eyes, an advantage over men of more solid parts and mature age. I resolved to interrupt their conversation as soon as I was at leisure. It was some time before this occurred; for I make it a rule to see for myself that everything needed at the performances in my house is at hand in its proper place. At last Miss Waterloo, who enacted the heroine, complained that my anxiety made her nervous, and begged me to go to the front and rest myself. I complied willingly and hastened to the side of Linda. As I approached, Porcharlester rose, saying, "I am going to take a peep behind: that is, if non-performers may be admitted."

"Oh, certainly," I said, glad to be rid of him. "But pray do not meddle with anything. The slightest hitch—"

"All right," he said, interrupting me. "I know how fidgety you are. I will keep my hands in my pockets all the time."

"You should not allow him to be disrespectful to you, Colonel Green," said Linda, when he was gone. "And I feel sure he will do no end of mischief behind the scenes."

"Boys will be boys," I replied. "Porcharlester's manner is just the same to General Johnston, who is quite an old man. How are your musical studies progressing?"

"I am full of Schubert just now. Oh, Colonel Green, *do* you know Schubert's serenade?"

"Ah! a charming thing. It is something like this, I think. Diddledi-dum, deediddledi-dum, deedum, deediddledyday."

"Yes, it is a little like that. Does Mr. Porcharlester sing it?"

"He tries to sing it. But he only appears to advantage when he sings trivial music. In nothing that demands serious sentiment, depth of feeling, matured sympathy, as it were—"

"Yes, yes. I know you think Mr. Porcharlester flippant. Do you like the serenade?"

"Hm! well, the fact is—Do *you* like it?"

"I love it. I dream of it. I have lived on it for the last three days."

"I must confess that it has always struck me as being a singularly beautiful piece of music. I hope to have the pleasure of hearing justice done to it by your voice when our little play is over."

"*I* sing it! Oh, I dare not. Ah! here is Mr. Porcharlester. I will make him promise to sing it for us."

"Green," said Porcharlester with ill-bred jocosity: "I don't wish to disturb you groundlessly; but the fellow who is to play the magic horn hasn't turned up."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed. "I ordered him for half-past seven sharp. If he fails, the play will be spoilt."

I excused myself briefly to Linda, and hurried to the hall. The

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horn was there, on the table. Porcharlester had resorted to an infamous trick to get rid of me. I was about to return and demand an explanation, when it occurred to me that, after all, the bandsman might have left his instrument there at the morning rehearsal and had perhaps not come. But a servant whom I called told me that the man had arrived with military punctuality at half-past seven, and had, according to my orders, been shown into the supper room joining the hall, and left there with a glass of wine and a sandwich. Porcharlester, then, had deceived me.

As the servant returned to his duties, leaving me alone and angry in the hall, my attention was curiously arrested by the gleaming brass curves of the instrument on the table. Amid the inanimate objects around me the horn seemed silent and motionless in a way apart, as though, pregnant with dreadful sound, it were consciously biding its time for utterance. I stole to the table, and cautiously touched one of the valves with my forefinger. After a moment I ventured to press it down. It clicked. At a sound in the supper room I started back guiltily. Then the prompter's bell tinkled. It was the signal for the cornist to prepare for his cue. I awaited the appearance of the bandsman with some shame, hoping that he would not discover that I had been childishly meddling with his instrument. But he did not come. My anxiety increased: I hurried into the supper room. There, at the head of the table, sat the soldier, fast asleep. Before him were five decanters empty. I seized his shoulder and shook him violently. He grunted; made a drunken blow at me; and relapsed into insensibility.

Swearing, in my anger, to have him shot for this mutiny, I rushed back to the hall. The bell rang again. This second bell was for the horn to sound. The stage was waiting. In that extremity I saw but one way to save the piece from failure. I snatched up the instrument; put the smaller end into my mouth; and puffed vigorously through it. Waste of breath! not a sound responded. I became faint with my exertions; and the polished brass slipped through my clammy hands. The bell again urgently broke the ruinous silence. Then I grasped the horn like a vice; inflated my lungs; jammed the mouthpiece against my lips and set my teeth until it nearly cut me; and spat fiercely into it. The result was a titanic blast. My ears received a deafening shock; the lamp glasses whirred; the hats of my visitors rained from their pegs; and I pressed my bursting temples between my palms as the soldier reeled out, pale as though the last trumpet had roused him, and confronted the throng of amazed guests who appeared on the stairs.

For the next three months I studied the art of horn-blowing

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under the direction of an adept. He worried me by his lower middle-class manners and his wearisome trick of repeating that the 'orn, as he called it, resembled the human voice more than any other instrument; but he was competent and conscientious; and I was persevering, in spite of some remonstrances from the neighbours. At last I ventured to ask him whether he considered me sufficiently advanced to play a solo in private for a friend.

"Well, Colonel," he said, "I tell you the truth, you haven't a born lip for it: at least, not yet. Then, you see, you blow so tremenjous. If you'll believe me, sir, it don't need all the muscle you put into it: it spoils the tone. What was you thinking of playing for your friend?"

"Something that you must teach me. Schubert's serenade."

He stared at me, and shook his head. "It ain't written for the hinstrument, sir," he said. "You'll never play it."

"The first time I play it through without a mistake, I will give you five guineas, besides our regular terms."

This overcame his doubts. I found the execution of the serenade, even after diligent practice, uncertain and very difficult. But I succeeded at last.

"If I was you, Colonel," said my instructor, as he pocketed the five guineas, "I'd keep that tune to myself, and play summat simpler for my friends. You can play it well enough here after half an hour's exercise; but when I'm not at your elbow you'll find it won't come so steady."

I made light of this hint, the prudence of which I now fully recognize. But at that time I was bent on a long cherished project of serenading Linda. Her house, near the northern end of Park Lane, was favourably situated for the purpose; and I had already bribed a servant to admit me to the small pleasure ground that lay between the house and the roadway. Late in June, I learned that she intended to repose for an evening from the fatigues of society. This was my opportunity. At nine o'clock I placed my horn in a travelling bag, and drove to the Marble Arch, where I alighted and walked to my destination. I was arrested by the voice of Porcharlester calling, "Hallo, Colonel!" As I did not wish to be questioned, I thought it best to forestall him by asking whither he was bound.

"I am going to see Linda," he replied. "She contrived to let me know last night that she would be alone all this evening. I don't mind telling you these things, Colonel: you are a man of honour, and you know how good she is. I adore her. If I could only be certain that it is myself, and not merely my voice that she likes, I should be the happiest man in England."

"I am quite sure that it cannot be your voice," I said.

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"Thank you," he exclaimed, grasping my hand: "it's very kind of you to say so; but I hardly dare flatter myself that you are right. It almost chokes me to look at her. Do you know I have never had the pluck to sing that serenade of Schubert's since she told me it was a favourite of hers?"

"Why? Does she not like your singing of it?"

"I tell you I have never ventured to sing it before her, though she is always at me for it. I am half jealous of that confounded tune. But I would do anything to please her; and I am going to surprise her with it tomorrow at Mrs. Locksly Hall's. I have been taking lessons and working like a dog to be able to sing it in really first-rate style. If you meet her, mind you don't breathe a word of this. It is to be a surprise."

"I have no doubt you will startle her," I said, exulting at the thought that he would be a day too late. I knew that it would take a finer voice than his to bear comparison with the melancholy sweetness, the sombre menace, the self-contained power with which the instrument I carried would respond to a skilful performer. We parted; and I saw him enter the house of Linda. A few minutes later, I was in the garden, looking up at them from my place in the shadow as they sat near the open window. Their conversation did not reach me: I thought he would never go. The night was a little cold; and the ground was damp. Ten o'clock struck—a quarter-past—half-past—I almost resolved to go home. Had not the tedium been relieved by some pieces which she played on the pianoforte, I could not have held out. At last they rose; and I was now able to distinguish their words.

"Yes," she said, "it is time for you to go." How heartily I agreed with her! "But you might have sung the serenade for me. I have played three times for you."

"I have a frightful cold," he said. "I really cannot. Good night."

"What nonsense! You have not the least symptom of a cold. No matter: I will never ask you again. Good night, Mr. Porcharlester."

"Do not be savage with me," he said. "You shall hear me sing it sooner than you think, perhaps."

"Ah! you say that very significantly. Sooner than I think! If you are preparing a surprise for me, I will forgive you. I shall see you at Mrs. Locksly Hall's tomorrow, I hope."

He assented, and hurried away, fearful, I suppose, lest he should betray his plan. When he was gone, she came to the window, and looked out at the stars. Gazing at her, I forgot my impatience: my teeth ceased to chatter. I took the horn from my travelling bag. She sighed; closed the window; and drew down a white blind.

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The sight of her hand alone as she did so would have inspired me to excel all my previous efforts. She seated herself so that I could see the shadow of her figure in profile. My hour was come. Park Lane was nearly still: the traffic in Oxford Street was too distant to be distracting.

I began. At the first note I saw her start and listen. When the completed phrase revealed to her what air I was playing, she laid down her book. The mouthpiece of my instrument was like ice; and my lips were stiff and chilly, so that in spite of my utmost care I was interrupted more than once by those uncouth guggling sounds which the best cornists cannot always avoid. Nevertheless considering that I was cold and very nervous, I succeeded fairly well. Gaining confidence as I went on, I partly atoned for the imperfection of the beginning by playing the concluding bars with commanding sonority, and even achieving a tolerable shake on the penultimate note.

An encouraging cheer from the street as I finished showed me that a crowd was collected there, and that immediate flight was out of the question. I replaced the horn in my bag, and made ready to go when the mob should disperse. Meanwhile I gazed at the shadow on the blind. She was writing now. Could she, I thought, be writing to me? She rose; and the shadow overspread the window so that I could no longer distinguish her movements. I heard a bell ring. A minute later the door of the house opened. I retreated behind an aloe tub; but on recognizing the servant whom I had bribed, I whistled softly to him. He came towards me with a letter in his hand. My heart beat strongly as I saw it.

"All right, sir," he said. "Miss Linda told me to give you this; but you are not to open it, if you please, until you get home."

"Then she knew who I was," I said eagerly.

"I suppose so, sir. When I heard her bell, I took care to answer it myself. Then she says to me, 'You'll find a gentleman somewhere in the pleasure ground. Give him this note; and beg him to go home at once. He is not to read it here.'"

"Is there any crowd outside?"

"All gone, sir. Thank you, sir. Good night, sir."

I ran all the way to Hamilton Place, where I got into a hansom. Ten minutes afterwards I was in my study, opening the letter with unsteady hands. It was not enclosed in an envelope, but folded in three, with a corner turned down. I opened it and read,

714, *Park Lane, Friday*

Dear Mr. Porcharlester—

I stopped. Had she then given him credit for my performance? A more immediately important question was whether I had any

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right to read a letter not addressed to me. Curiosity and love prevailed over this scruple.

The letter continued thus :

I am sorry that you have seen nothing in my fancy for Schubert's serenade except matter for ridicule. Perhaps it was an exaggerated fancy ; but I would not have expressed it to you had I not believed you capable of understanding it. If it be any satisfaction to you to know that you have cured me of it thoroughly, pray believe that I shall never again hear the serenade without a strange mixture of mirth and pain. I did not know that a human throat could compass such sounds ; and I little thought, when you promised that I should hear your voice sooner than I expected, that you contemplated such a performance. I have only one word more : Adieu. I shall not have the pleasure of meeting you at Mrs. Locksly Hall's tomorrow, as my engagements will not permit me to go there. For the same reason I fear I must deny myself the pleasure of receiving you again this season.

I am, dear Mr. Porcharlester, yours truly,

LINDA FITZNIGHTINGALE

I felt that to forward this letter to Porcharlester would only pain him uselessly. I felt also that my instructor was right, and that I have not the lip for the French horn. I have accordingly given it up.

Linda is now my wife. I sometimes ask her why she persists in cutting Porcharlester, who has pledged me his word as an officer and a gentleman that he is unconscious of having given her the slightest ground for offence. She always refuses to tell me.

* * *

THE MERMAID

Say not the mermaid is a myth,
I knew one once named Mrs. Smith.
She stood while playing cards or knitting ;
Mermaids are not equipped for sitting.

OGDEN NASH

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HEIGH! THE SWEET BIRDS

A miscellany of fine feathers

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe ;
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

'Beware the Jabberwock, my son !
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch !
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch ! '

LEWIS CARROLL, 1832-1898,
Alice Through the Looking-Glass

Enticement

To take such wilde duckes as are about your pondes to make them tame, . . . you must take of the roote and seed of Henbane a good quantitie, and lay it to steepe in a basen full of water a whole day and a night; afterward put there into wheat, and boile all together untill the said corne be well steept and swelled, . . . the wilde duckes will runne unto it, and as soone as they shall have eaten it they will fall downe all astonished and giddie.

CHARLES ESTIENNE, 1504–1564,
La Maison Rustique, translated
by Richard Surflet in 1600

Parrot Stuffed

Her neat small room, adorn'd with maiden-taste,
A clipp'd French puppy, first of favourites, graced :
A parrot next, but dead and stuff'd with art ;
(For Poll, when living, lost the Lady's heart,
And then his life; for he was heard to speak
Such frightful words as tinged his Lady's cheek :)
Unhappy bird! who had no power to prove,
Save by such speech, his gratitude and love.

GEORGE CRABBE, 1754–1832,
The Parish Register

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The Rivals

I heard a bird at dawn
Singing sweetly on a tree,
That the dew was on the lawn,
And the wind was on the lea ;
But I didn't listen to him,
For he didn't sing to me !

I was singing all the time,
Just as prettily as he,
About the dew upon the lawn,
And the wind upon the lea !
So I didn't listen to him,
As he sang upon a tree !

JAMES STEPHENS

Resource

If birds are so very wild that all fair and quiet shooting fails, they are *still*, ninety nine times in a hundred, *to be got*, if absolutely wanted, to win a wager, for a sick person, or for any very particular purpose. But the process for this is anything but steady sporting, and can only be well followed in an open country . . . Fly a *paper kite*, regularly painted like a bird of prey, at about thirty yards above the ground, and with a very long string, so as for the man who flies, and walks with it, to be at a distance ; while the shooter and his dog approach behind the kite. I tried this one day, and it answered ; otherwise I should not have named it.

LT.-COL. PETER HAWKER, 1786-1853
(*Instructions to Young Sportsmen in all that relates to Guns and Shooting*)

Fatality

The bird, however hard the frost may be, flies briskly to his customary roosting-place, and, with beak tucked into his wing, falls asleep. He has no apprehensions ; only the hot blood grows colder and colder, the pulse feebler as he sleeps, and at midnight, or in the early morning, he drops from his perch—dead . . . If you were to take him up and drop him from your hand, he would fall to the ground like a stone or a lump of clay—so easy and swift is the passage from life to death in wild nature ! But he was never miserable.

W. H. HUDSON, 1841–1922,
Birds in Town and Village

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Companyes of Foules

An Herde of swannys
A Nye of fesauntys
A Bevy of quayles
A Sedge of herons
A Sord of malards
A Walke of snytes
An Exaltynge of larkys
A Flyghte of dovves
An Unkyndnes of ravens
A Clayterynge of choughes
A Gagle of geys
A Brode of hennys
(And, of course),
A Badelynge of dokys.

DAME JULIANA BERNERS,
Fifteenth Century, The Boke of St. Albans

On The Wing

The swift is almost continually on the wing; and as it never settles on the ground, on trees, or roofs, would seldom find opportunity for amorous rites, was it not enabled to indulge them in the air. If any person would watch these birds of a fine morning in May, as they are sailing round at a great height from the ground, he would see, every now and then, one drop on the back of another, and both of them sink down together for many fathoms with a loud piercing shriek. This I take it to be the juncture when the business of generation is carrying on.

As the swift eats, drinks, collects materials for its nest, and, as it seems, propagates on the wing, it appears to live more in the air than any other bird, and to perform all functions there save those of sleeping and incubation.

GILBERT WHITE OF SELBORNE, 1720–1793

Cuckoo Song

Cuccu, cuccu, well singes thu, cuccu :
Ne swik thu naver nu ;
Sing cuccu, nu, sing cuccu,
Sing cuccu, sing cuccu, nu !

Author Unknown, Thirteenth Century

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THE LIGHTHOUSE

"We're just two people," she said. "All we want is here"

by H. E. BATES

THE thin tongue of coast was so flat that it was like a scar on the sea. Nothing rose above the level of all the one-storeyed shacks scattered about it like cubes of sea-worn wreckage except a lighthouse, standing up like a vast white candle in a sky of great width and loftiness, so that from a distance it seemed to float in air.

By the end of September, after the heat of summer, the sea-flowers were dead. A long flat tide floated in, almost limped in, washing over and over again the same wide salt-grey waste of sand, the same bright finger of shingle, black with fresh-strewn sea-weed and sprinkled with pretty white and rose and turquoise shells. Salt dust blew on small winds from one side of the road to the other, rattling harshly on steely patches of sea-thistle and dune-grass, and then blew back again. It drifted finely against the shacks, with their sun-spent flowers, that would soon be closed for winter, and buried the steps of their porches a little deeper every day.

From the end of the peninsula it was a two mile walk for Brand to get the papers. Every morning he walked along the cracked concrete road and bought the papers and perhaps a magazine from the shop where squat plaice boats, curtained about with kipper-coloured netting, were beached from the bay. The air was always strong with the smell of sun-dried sea-fish and gangs of swooping gulls crying about the boats and he was always thirsty by the time he began to walk back along the shore.

Half way back was a shack, facing the sea, that had tin-plate advertisements nailed over one side of it so that it glittered harshly, blue and green and white and red, in the sun. He noticed it first not because of the advertisements but because it had outside it a square of grass. This grass, watered all summer, was vivid green in the desert of beach and sand. In the middle of it was a white flag-pole and at the top of the flag-pole was a triangular scarlet flag, with ICES sewn across it in white letters.

He had been there nearly a week when he first went in. Sun and sea-air had warped the jerry-built glass door so that he had to push it violently before it would open. Before he knew it he was half-thrown into the small café, against the counter.

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Behind the counter stood a woman in a black fur coat and a green scarf on her head and through a window behind her he could see the sea.

"And about time too," she said. "I thought you were never coming."

She was smoking a cigarette and she did not take the cigarette from her mouth when she spoke to him. It was burning short and the smoke was curling up into her big face, crinkling the pouches under her eyes.

Suddenly, looking at him again, she burst out laughing.

"Oh! God alive, I thought it was the taxi."

He smiled and she began coughing violently from smoke and laughter, so that grey ash spilt in a fine cloud on the black fur coat. She laughed again and did not shake it free.

"Hear that?" she called. "Gentleman came in and I thought it was the cab."

Behind the counter was a door and he could see a kitchen beyond it but no one answered.

"Terribly sorry, sir." The cigarette smoke burned straight up into her baggy colourless eyes. "Very rude of me." She let the ash drop on to her coat again. "Something we can get you?"

"Glass of milk?" he said.

"Sorry, no milk. It's the drought. They cut us down." She took the cigarette out of her mouth, coughing ash on the counter. "Excuse me. Cuppa tea?"

"Cup of tea."

"Haven't seen a taxi anywhere, I suppose, have you? What do you make the time?"

"Just after eleven."

"Supposed to be here for eleven. Puts years on you." She looked beyond him, irritated, through the glass door. "Same with everything."

He did not answer. She took a packet of cigarettes from the pocket of her fur coat and lit a fresh cigarette from the old, coughing again.

"Gentleman'd like a cuppa tea," she called. "Got one on?"

There was no answer.

"Whyn't you sit down?" she said. "On holiday? Got a beach hut here?"

"Up by the lighthouse."

"Getting a bit late in the season. What d'you do with yourself all day?"

He did not know what to say; there was no point in telling her he was bored all day. Then suddenly, she began coughing again, this time with excitement, spilling ash on her coat, the

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coarse skin of her face and neck creasing and flopping up and down; and in the same moment he heard the taxi on the road outside.

"God alive, I must fly!"

She came from behind the counter, waddling and coughing, picking up her handbag from the corner of the counter as she passed him.

"Cab's here!" she called. "No message for Fred?"

She pulled the door open and went out across the square of grass under the flag-pole to where, on the concrete beyond, the taxi was turning round. The thin door banged loudly, shaking the walls of the shack, but there was no answer from the room behind.

He sat on one of the stools by the counter and opened the paper. Every day they were saying it was the driest, hottest summer for fifty years. There was already something boring about the sequence of dead dry days and the calm glitter of sea.

"Sugar?"

He looked up to see a girl standing at the door behind the counter. The high sea-light coming in at the window fell full on her face and made her eyes, especially, seem very large. They were dark brown eyes with extraordinary whites that were not really white at all. They were a pure pale blue, wet and shining, that made the point of the pupils almost black.

"Please," he said.

"One or two?"

"One."

He heard the lump of sugar clink on the spoon. She came up to the counter, carrying a cup in one hand and a tea-pot in the other.

"Anything in the paper?"

She poured out the tea.

"Not much."

"Never is." She tried for a second or two to read the paper where it was on the counter, upside down. "Anything to eat? I forgot to ask you."

"No," he said. "Just the tea."

She gave up trying to read the paper upside down and for some moments stood with her arms folded on the counter. She had slim cream hands, the skin thin and transparent, so that the veins shone through like soft blue tendrils; and the fingers were slightly upturned as they lay on the smooth golden hairs of her forearms.

"Busy these days?" he said.

"I can be busy. Just how it takes me. Where are you?"

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" Up by the lighthouse."

She turned the paper round where it lay on the counter, turning it with one long finger, so that she could read it with her head only slightly averted. Her neck was long and deep cream under the dark brown hair.

" Ever been up there ? " she said.

" No. Not me. Makes me giddy."

" Does it ? " she said. " Funny. Never affects me."

" Ugh," he said.

" Got a beach hut ? "

" Yes."

" What do you do for cooking ? I hear there's no gas up there."

" Never bother."

" You're the sort of people who put us out of business," she said.

He did not know what to say ; he stirred his tea without drinking and remembered the woman running for the taxi.

" That your mother ? "

" Don't blame me," she said. " She was born first. Off to London for the week while I look after the sea."

With that curious expression she turned the paper round again, so that she could read it right way up. He found himself screwing his own head round, trying to read it as she had done, upside down, and as he did so he was aware of her body pressed against the counter. She gave him a quick glance and then went on reading ; and after some moments she spoke without looking up.

" Not drinking your tea," she said.

He sipped it gently, looking down at her over the edge of the cup.

She turned the paper over, lifting her body slightly in the act of doing so, raising her eyes, brown and casual, in the slightest flicker.

" I'll bet you think I'm rude. Reading your paper."

" No," he said. " You can have it. I don't want it. Keep it and I'll call in later."

" Come in and I'll get you a meal," she said. " Why don't you ? You must eat sometimes."

" I could."

" Well, say it as if you wanted to," she said.

He smiled.

" Nothing elaborate, just eggs or something. But say it as if you wanted to."

She stared up at him with great brown eyes that were casual and bored but brilliant too with bright sea-light ; he looked back at her and felt the blood beating up in his throat. He thought

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too that she knew it was beating there because she held him a little longer with that same slow bored stare.

"All right?"

"All right," he said.

She smiled. She had a way of smiling by opening her mouth and putting her tongue slowly outward and pressing it against her teeth and then upward, casually and softly, against her lip.

"About six?" she said.

"About six."

She pressed her tongue upward against her lips and then, as if deliberately letting him go, lowered her eyes and folded her long creamy arms, blue with tender veins, on the paper.

"Now drink your tea," she said.

Walking back along the sea-road, he thought of Ella. Things had not been going well with Ella. More and more she seemed to him like a peremptory bright-nosed hen decked up. She had begun to be a great one on committees. At supper, after the office, she bored him with histories of committees rather as she must, he thought, have bored the committees. Sometimes, in hasty moments, he did silly things like putting his socks on inside out and that in turn would urge her to endless nagging resolutions, all of which he felt she had put down on the agenda of their married differences. Whenever she came home from committees she wore the same dark brown straw hat. It was too small for her; it sat on her head, mocking her, like a ridiculous piece of flat stale toast. He longed to jump on it. One day he almost did jump on it and she screamed: "The trouble with you is that you can't tolerate anything but yourself!" and in a fit of rage he had driven the car down to the sea.

Back at the point, by the lighthouse, he read the papers and watched the tide. It washed over a series of shallow corrugated valleys, blue-grey with jelly-fish and sown with the pretty coloured shells. The sandy peninsula projected so far out to sea that ships skirted it by only a hundred and fifty yards. Sometimes liners came so close that he could see even the sparkle of drinks in passengers' glasses in the dining-saloons or the lounge. And sometimes passengers waved their hands.

He wondered about these passengers. Who were they all? Among them were surely men who hated their wives because they wore hats like slices of toast and wives who hated their husbands for the monstrosity of trivial things.

He began to think of the girl in the café. Her voice, throaty and casual, seemed to come along the sea-shore with the lazy softness of the tide. He thought of her hands. There was something

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intensely disturbing in their creamy transparence and the blue tendril veins. And then the extraordinary dark brown eyes, with the whites that were really not white, but blue, like some of the smoother pearl-like shells. And then the bored casual way of pressing her tongue against her teeth and the bored casual way of trying to read the paper upside down.

He swam twice during the afternoon. The sea, heavily salt and warm, made him hungry and drowsy. The sun curved round and shone flat on his face. He slept without realising it and woke suddenly with the idea that one of the ships was ramming the point. It was a liner painted white for the tropics and it seemed for a second or two to tangle itself with the white cone of the lighthouse and come bearing down on him where he lay.

It was past six when he woke and nearly seven o'clock by the time he had dressed and walked along the sea-road to where the scarlet flag was waving above the circle of watered grass in the evening sun.

The shack was closed. He started to rap on the thin glass door. The door was loose and rattled loudly, echoing across the empty beach in the warm still air.

After a moment or two he gave it up and went round to the back. The girl was lying on the sand, in a white and red-spotted cotton beach-dress, without shoes or stockings, her long blue-veined creamy legs and arms stretched out in the sun. She did not get up.

"You're a nice one," she said.

"I went to sleep. I didn't realize—"

"I got fed up and closed. Nobody to talk to all afternoon so I came out to look after the sea."

Again he noticed that curious expression.

"I'm sorry," he said.

She rolled over and lay sideways, looking up at him.

"Well: what do you fancy?"

"Anything; if it's not too late—whatever you've got."

"It isn't what I've got, it's what you fancy."

"Whatever you've got I'll fancy," he said.

"Well, if that's the way you look at it—" She moved once again on the sand, turning her body. "Can't see you. You're upside down." He remembered how she had read the newspaper upside down and something in the turn of her body immediately electrified him, making the blood beat up in his throat.

"Oh! You're the same man. I wondered. Your voice sounded different."

"Disappointed?"

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"Oh! no. No. I just got the impression of you in my mind somehow and I like to get the right impression—" She suddenly knelt up, brushing away sand from her dress. "Well, let's go in. The sea can look after itself for a bit."

It struck him again as curious how she spoke, now and then, of looking after the sea. She stood up, brushing sand from first one leg and another and then from one arm and another.

"Am I all sand at the back?"

"On your shoulders."

"Brush me down, will you? It gets into everything—food and everything. Beds and everywhere."

He brushed with both hands at the half-circle of her naked shoulder. The skin was smooth and oily and he felt the blood beat up into his throat again as he touched it with the sweeping tips of his fingers under the thick brown hair.

"I'll fry you a Dover sole," she said. "A good fat one. How's that?"

"It's just what I fancy," he said.

She had the sole ready in about half an hour. She pulled the blinds down on that side of the café overlooking the sea-road and she laid him a table overlooking the sea. From there, as he waited, he could see the lighthouse. The lamps had not begun to turn and the tall white cylinder looked more than ever like an unlit candle on the narrow scar of sand.

"Been up the lighthouse yet?"

She was in the kitchen and he called back: "No. I told you. Makes me feel—"

"You'll have to try it some day."

"Not me," he said.

The sole, dipped in golden breadcrumbs, was nicely fried.

"All right?" she said.

"Lovely. What about you?"

"You're a customer. Can't eat with the customers."

"I hoped you could."

"Well, there's no law against it. I'll have a cup of tea."

She had changed her dress and now she was wearing a thin frock of silky sea-bright green. It gave a smouldering candle-like warmth to her bare arms as she crooked them on the table and watched him eat.

"You wanted that. You were hungry," she said.

"Didn't bother about lunch."

She looked at the sea. It was after eight o'clock and now suddenly, in a flash, the lamps in the lighthouse began turning, swinging startling bars of light on darkening water and shore.

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"There she goes," the girl said. "I always love that. It sends a thrill right through me. Right down. A real thrill. I watch it every night."

She was watching the light eagerly, her mouth parted, her tongue touching her lip as she smiled.

As it grew slowly darker ships with star-like navigation lights became dotted about a copper-crested sea that was deep indigo under a paler sky. After watching them for some time she turned her face and looked at him.

"Married?" she said.

"No," he said.

"You ought to get yourself a nice wife that can cook."

"Are you married?" he said.

"No," she said. "Not me."

Who was Ella? The sudden accusing unreality of Ella forced itself on his conscience for a moment and then assumed the remoteness of one of the lights creeping slowly away to sea. His wife seemed in every way like one of those dim lights going out, going away for ever. Committees and the hat like toast, agenda of married faults and the face like a peremptory pecking hen's: there was no lie about them. They did not exist any more.

"What about Fred?" he said. He remembered the parting words of her mother.

"Oh! Fred. Fred's nobody. He's cook up there. We've got another café at King's Cross. He's cook up there." The lids of her eyes, olive and dark and gleaming, closed down smoothly as she looked at his empty cup and plate. "More tea?"

"No, thank you."

"Like to go outside for a breath of air?"

"If you like."

They were already outside when she spoke once again of looking after the sea. The shack had a small railed verandah overlooking the beach. Sand had piled against it in deep smooth breasts, submerging the steps. She leaned against one of the posts of it. The shore was dark except for the repeated flash of the lighthouse, revolving like a wheel, and as she stared at the sea and spoke again of looking after it he said:

"Think it'll run away or something?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Oh! nothing."

He watched the lighthouse flashing on her face, heightening sharply every few seconds or so the candle-like warmth given by the green dress; and then he said:

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"Odd. What's the idea of looking after the sea? That's one thing that'll look after itself—"

She turned on him in the moment that the lighthouse flashed. It gave the impression of her entire body leaping into flame. All her bored casual face flared up, bright and bitter and angry.

"What else have I got to do? God, I got nothing else to do but look after it, have I? Nobody to talk to from Monday to Friday. Nothing to do, nobody to talk to. What else have I got to do but look after it? God, I feel it's all I've got left sometimes."

The act of kissing her for the first time had in it the shock of something bare and bruising and antagonistic. He had not expected it to be like that. He had wanted it to be drawn out of her sleepy languid casualness: to be one with the soft brown eyes, the way she read the paper upside down. Now she held him with both arms and the stiffened frame of her body, driving her mouth at his with dry hunger of long boredom; and all the time the lighthouse flashed with its dazzling revolutions on her face.

After a time she was quieter and they lay down on the sand. He could hear the sea: gentle, the tide out, endless small waves licking backwards in the warm September darkness. "If you hadn't turned up I'd have gone off my head. I thought you wouldn't turn up—I'd have gone off my head—"

He liked her more as she quietened. She seemed to grow drowsy and languid again, the frame of her body in its relaxation melting into the deep softness he wanted: the entire antithesis of Ella, the pecking hen-like face, the toast-like hat; the antidote to all his own dry boredom and rage. He found her limbs in long deep curves. Her skin had seemed so delicate, with its fine transparence and the many blue tendrils of veins, that the full discovered strength of her body surprised him. "I wanted you like that," she said, "by the sea. I wanted you terribly." The lighthouse flashed on her face, giving the brown eyes a look of transfixed dark burning. "Be careful how you touch me. You make me feel how the lighthouse does."

Walking home at last, after midnight, he understood her feeling about the lighthouse. It had been the flame in the drabness of her boredom: burning and flashing suddenly to excite her once a day. He was pleased to think he was like that. He was pleased to stand where he was and watch, like a fading down-channel light, the dying discordant figure of Ella and Ella's hat, the former world of committees and catechisms and the pecking hen. He felt slightly intoxicated and elated as if he stood on the top of the lighthouse, watching the minute and inconsequential light of something that had bored and angered him and would do so no longer.

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He had arranged to go back for lunch next day. "Not too early," she said, "because I can close up from two to five. You can swim and have a lie in the sun," and in the morning, for the first time, he did not trouble to fetch the papers. It was enough to wait for afternoon.

But about two o'clock, after they had eaten and just as she was about to lock up, something happened. He looked out of the windows and saw a wild troop of boy-scouts invading the shore. Soon they began to invade the shack. He had dreamed so long of lying with her in warm sun, alone on the shore, that the sight of scores of small boys besieging her for ice cream and drinks and sandwiches brought him furious frustration. She too looked desperate and he could have hit a ridiculous grey-haired scout-master who said:

"You may remember us. We dropped in last year. We remembered your flag."

Bathing and yelling, punting footballs, littering the shore with cartons and trousers and shirts and papers, the boys stayed until six o'clock. So many of them came into the shack that finally he took off his jacket and for four hours, impotent and full of hatred of them, he helped the girl behind the counter. All afternoon there was a dry hunger in her eyes that made him think she could not wait for him.

"Well, it'll please Ma," she said when it was all over. And then a cheerful thought: "Anyway we took enough so we can close tomorrow and the next day. That's if there's no boy scouts."

"There'll be no boy scouts," he said. "Tomorrow we'll go to the lighthouse."

"That's an idea."

"Perhaps we could have a trip in the car."

"I'd like that. That would be lovely," she said.

Again and again, in the darkness on the shore, to the sound of small consuming lapping waves, the lighthouse flashed on her face. Her long arms held him down on the soft sand and the deep brown eyes burned insatiably.

Next day, when they climbed the lighthouse, a little breeze was blowing in fitful gusts against the sun. It had the effect of ploughing the sea into furrows of brilliant white and blue. Along the coast small sails skimmed about; white gulls planed down on long air-currents about black plaice boats and the dazzling candle of light-house; and the white sea-light was heady and beautiful.

It seemed to him that the top of the lighthouse swayed. All his fear of heights rushed up through his body and he felt the irresistible paralysing terror of wanting to go over. It froze the

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back of his legs coldly and he was hardly conscious of the keeper who was also a guide saying:

"The point puts on another six feet of land every year. Can you see where it's creeping out? Ten or fifteen years and they'll have to be thinking of building another lighthouse."

Brand could not look and the keeper pointed inland over flats of sea-thistled shingle:

"That's the old lighthouse. That shows where the point used to be."

All the time the girl moved carelessly from side to side of the lighthouse top, following the keeper's fingers, leaning nonchalantly over, long arms folded, staring straight down. To Brand's intense horror she hung over the side, laughing, waving to groups of people below.

"For God's sake," he said and felt terribly and weakly sick at the thought that a beating squall of wind might, in an awful moment, move the wrong way and take her over.

"Now if you'll follow me down, sir," the keeper said.

They stood for a moment together, alone on the top. She held him flat against her body, her skirt flapping in the breeze against her legs, and he could have sworn that once again the lighthouse swayed.

She kissed him, holding him rigidly, but he knew the lighthouse rocked. For some idiotic reason he thought of the precarious toast-like hat perched on Ella's head and the girl said:

"Don't be so jittery. There's nothing to be scared of—"

"I hate it. I always have hated it."

"It's because you let it," she said. "If you looked down—just made yourself look down—you'd be all right." She began laughing at him: gay with the quivering exhilaration of breeze and height and sun. "Come on—look down. Make yourself. It's better."

Once again she leaned far over. This time she held his hand and for the space of a second or two he looked down too, his entire body wrapped in a stiffened chrysalis of vertigo. A sinister narrowing world of shore, of boats, of faces and of kaleidoscopic sea-waves seemed to draw him down and then the girl laughed at him again, mocking slightly:

"Come on. You can't take it. The keeper's waiting."

Even fifty or sixty feet below he could still feel the horror in his legs and he said:

"Don't you feel anything? Doesn't it affect you at all?"

"Only like you," she said. "That nice feeling. Right through my body."

She was pleased about the car. From the new lighthouse they

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drove inland, through a flat sea-beaten world of drab shingle and faded sea-poppy and steely sea-thistle, towards the old. He thought its black tarred stump looked hideous even among the cracked concrete of ruined sea-defences and shabby summer bungalows whose doorsteps were being slowly buried by autumn sand.

"Like an old lady going to a funeral or something," the girl said.

Like every horrifying experience the cold moments at the lighthouse top afterwards exhilarated him. For each of the three following nights as he lay on the shore with the girl he felt a certain vague bravery about it all.

"I'm your lighthouse," he would say to her. Already it was Friday and for two nights he had not troubled to go back to sleep at the hut. "I make you feel the same way—"

"Not after tonight," she said.

A moment of freezing sickness, identical with all he had felt on the lighthouse, turned his stomach over.

"What are you talking about?"

"Ma comes tomorrow. Did you forget? She's down every week-end, Saturday to Monday."

"Oh! God," he said, "is that all? I thought—"

"You better keep out of the way," she said. "Just for a night or two."

"I could come in for a cup of tea or something," he said, "couldn't I? She'd never know."

"Not Ma?" she said. "The old gimlet. Not Ma? You never get over Ma."

"God," he said, "the whole week-end—"

"There's all next week," she said. "Plenty of time." He felt the reasoning sweetness in her express itself in one of those slow casual expanding smiles. Her tongue touched her lip and a wonderful beauty of dark eyes held him profoundly as the lighthouse flashed. He was agonized once again by the thought of giving her up and she said: "A rest from each other will do us good. Then we'll have all next week. What are you worrying for?"

"I want you—all the time. Terribly—"

"I'm here," she said. He saw all the languid beauty of her long curving body as she pressed herself down into dark dry sand. "Nobody is stopping you."

The next day, Saturday, he did not see her at all. He could not bring himself to walk along the sea-road; he did not want the papers. Teasing him, she had said, "You can always go up the lighthouse. You can wave from there. If I see you I'll know it's you."

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And that afternoon, in a moment of puerile anguish, he went up. A great dry loneliness, horrible as the lifeless sea-broken concrete road and the barren shingle, had held him all day. From the top of the lighthouse the tranquil bay, circled by a gigantic bracelet of sun-dried sand, was like pure glass, windless and beautiful. He stared across lines of plaice boats and a few trippers to the shack. The red flag had not enough air to raise it from the pole; but he could see, underneath it, the spray of a water-hose, sprinkling the bright square of grass.

Presently he saw figures there. It seemed like a man and perhaps, he tried to persuade himself, the girl; but it was much too far away. He even waved his hand; but nothing happened and soon, driven by sudden misery and vertigo, he hurried down.

For the rest of that day and during Sunday his only remedy was to swim and walk westward, away from the shack, in the queer derelict half-urban, half-marsh country between the two lighthouses. He began to think of Ella. When he was with the girl all his thought of Ella was moulded in terms of an amused and tolerant pity. Poor dear old Ella: he really felt sorry for her. All the discordance about her vanished. Did she wonder about him? Had she gone round in panic circles of distress? Had it spoiled the routine of committees, the hideous respectable pose of the toast-like hat? What would she say, he thought, if she could see me now? Poor dear old Ella. The ease of that long generous body on the sand would have shocked her, would have made her realize that there were not only women who gave more pleasure than they asked but gave it without asking questions, as beautifully as flowers.

But that day, as he tried to wear out Sunday, he did not have many amused and rather fanciful thoughts of women like flowers. Ella appeared to stand up in the flat endless day with the gauntness of the old lighthouse above the ugly marsh. She was a terrible relic, Ella; and somehow Sunday was her day. She had a great fondness for fussing about the kitchen on Sunday mornings, roasting beef, baking a particular kind of tart called Maids of Honour. What maids, he would tease her, and what honour? Her hands were floury and he ate the tarts from the stove, while they were still hot.

Today, inexplicably, between loneliness and discordance, he felt keenly the absence of these trivialities. It was not permanent; he knew that. It was just Sunday. It was less that he missed Ella than that Sunday was a day of infinite desolation when deprived of the comfort of floured hands, beef, hot tarts and long-known company. Monday would show it all to have been another example of puerile heart-ache; but today he could not bear it at all.

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And finally, because he could not bear it, he walked along, about half-past seven, to the shack. Lights were burning and a few people were having supper. He walked past and got himself several drinks, a mile farther on, at a place called *The Fisherman's Arms*, before walking back again.

When he walked back lights were still burning in the shack but the place seemed empty. After a few moments he went in. The girl's mother was leaning on the counter, coughing cigarette ash down the heavy black front of her body, but there was no sign of the girl.

" Yessir ? " she said.

" Too late for anything ? "

" Never too late for anything. What'll it be ? Coffee, tea, orange ? "

" I'll take coffee."

" You'll take coffee," she said.

While he drank it he said :

" Remember me ? I'm the fellow you mistook for the taxi driver last Monday."

" God alive, so it is." Coughing and laughing, she sprayed a small cloud of cigarette ash. " I don't know whatever you thought of me, sir."

" Your daughter made up for it," he said. " Got me a nice meal that day."

" Nice cook," she said.

He looked round the café. " Not here tonight ? "

" Gone to the flicks with Fred."

" Fred ?" he said. He could feel a horrible tightness, cold and not unlike the vertigo he so hated and dreaded, taking hold of his body, cramping it into a chrysalis of jealousy and fear. " Boy friend ? "

" Boy friend my foot," she said. " Husband."

Monday brought, as he knew it would, the notion that to be lonely for Ella was something quite puerile. Between the thought of Ella and the thought of the girl he felt a haunting and growing sense of being cheated. Ella, he felt, had got him into this. He felt dislocated, slightly crazy, trapped. That infernally silly hen-like face, the committees and the maddening toast-like hat had manoeuvred him into a trap.

It was late afternoon before he could bring himself to go along to the café. The girl had closed the café and he found her lying behind it, as he always did, on the sand. The breeze of the last few days had piled up still higher the smooth clean breasts of sand below the verandah, submerging yet another of the steps. In one

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of the hollows between these breasts she lay in her red beach-dress, staring at the sky.

"Oh God, I thought you were never coming. I wanted you terribly—I hated the waiting—"

He let himself be drawn down, almost sucked down, by her long arms and the tightened frame of her body, stiffly anguished as it had been when he had first kissed her.

"Did you want me?" she said.

"All the time," he said. "How was the week-end?"

"Oh! terrible. She talked and talked. Nothing but talk. I was bored to death. What did you do?"

"Went to the lighthouse."

"There," she said. "You see. How was it?"

"I'm getting better. It's like you said. I just need practice."

She laughed, pressing her tongue against her lips, her brown eyes brilliant and languid and burning in the shell-like whites.

"One more trip and you'll be all right," she said.

"Might be."

"Probably when you're all right you won't make me feel how you do," she said. "Had you thought of that?"

"No."

"Make me feel like it now," she said.

He did not speak of Fred until they lay in the sand in darkness. A twisted and crazy sort of dislocation made him keep back, until then, all he felt by way of the trap, the cheating and the jealousy. Out at sea small navigation lights floated about like stars and one of them, as before, was Ella, dying and fading away; and he hated her because of his pain.

"How was the husband?" he said.

"You don't have to speak like that," she said. "No need to speak like that." Her face, in the flash from the lighthouse, was undisturbed, casual and languid as ever.

"You didn't tell me," he said.

"It didn't make any difference. It didn't and it doesn't now."

"Me during the week and a change for Sundays," he said. Rage beat at his pride with callous and lacerating strokes of pain. He felt himself drop away, crazy and blinded and embittered by acid dregs of cheating and jealousy. All the time he was aware of her moving her body with quiet suppleness deeper into the sand and that movement too made him ache with helpless bitterness.

"You didn't tell me either," she said. "But it wouldn't make any difference if you did. No difference at all."

"I'd nothing to tell." His voice was quiet; he could hear the tide slowly coming in across the sand.

"Well, then—who should care?" She moved in the sand

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again, supple and astonishingly quiet, and in distraction he found her body once again in long deep curves ; the flash of the lighthouse fell on her mouth, making it glisten and then leaving it wonderfully dark again as the light swung out to sea.

" We're just two people," she said. " People get so messed up about the right and wrong of things. We're just two people. What do we want with rights and wrongs? All we want is here."

No ; not here, he thought. He tried to listen to the tide ; but he was distracted by the feel of her soft body into agonies of mind that flung up thoughts of Ella and the lighthouse. He determined not to be afraid of the lighthouse any longer and now, too, he remembered the girl, high up there, leaning over.

" Come on, kiss me ; it's nothing," she said. " Come on : once more like the lighthouse. In case it cures you. You never know."

She folded him down into a body that had lost the last of its rigidity and seemed now to have the quality of burying him into itself, like the sand. The lighthouse flashed several times, across the shore and across the long, oblivious kiss and then she freed her face and said, smiling :

" When do we go up again ? "

" Tomorrow ? " he said.

His heart, at that moment, seemed to stop beating. His body lay imprisoned in its harsh chrysalis of jealousy and weakness and fear. He could not look at her face ; and down on the shore there was no movement but a small wind eating at the sea and innumerable small waves casually consuming what remained of the waste of sand.

* * *

EUREKA !

A man who had a cello with a single string used to bow on it for hours at a time, always holding his finger in the same place. His wife endured this for months. Finally in desperation she said, " I have observed that when others play that instrument there are four strings, and the players move their fingers about continuously."

" Of course the others have four strings and move their fingers about constantly," he explained patiently. " They are looking for the place. I've found it ! "

WILLIAM SAROYAN, *Fables*

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HAPPY EVENT

"Oh, you devil," gasped Michael, "six pancakes"

by LIAM O'FLAHERTY

LITTLE Michael rose before dawn. He tried to be as quiet as possible. He ate two slices of bread and butter and drank a cup of milk, although he hated cold milk with bread and butter in the morning. But on an occasion like this, what did it matter what a boy ate? He was going out to watch the black sheep having a lamb. His father had mentioned the night before that the black sheep was sure to lamb that morning, and of course there was a prize, three pancakes, for the first one who saw the lamb.

He lifted the latch gently and stole out. It was best not to let his brother John know he was going. He would be sure to want to come too. As he ran down the lane, his sleeves, brushing against the evergreen bushes, were wetted by the dew, and the tip of his cap was just visible above the hedge, bobbing up and down as he ran. He was in too great a hurry to open the gate and tore a little hole in the breast of his blue jersey climbing over it. But he didn't mind that. He would get another one on his birthday.

He turned to the left from the main road, up a lane that led to the field where his father, the magistrate, kept his prize sheep. It was only a quarter of a mile, that lane, but he thought that it would never end and he kept tripping among the stones that strewed the road. It was so awkward to run on the stones wearing shoes, and it was too early in the year yet to be allowed to go barefooted. He envied Little Jimmy, the son of the farm labourer, who was allowed to go barefooted all the year round, even in the depths of winter, and who always had such wonderful cuts on his big toes, the envy of all the little boys in the village school.

He climbed over the fence leading into the fields and, clapping his hands together, said, "Oh, you devil," a swear word he had learned from Little Jimmy and of which he was very proud. He took off his shoes and stockings and hid them in a hole in the fence. Then he ran jumping, his bare heels looking like round brown spots as he tossed them up behind him. The grass was wet and the ground was hard, but he persuaded himself that it was great fun.

Going through a gap into the next field, he saw a rabbit nibbling grass. He halted suddenly, his heart beating loudly. Pity he hadn't

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a dog. The rabbit stopped eating. He cocked up his ears. He stood on his tail, with his neck craned up and his fore feet hanging limp. Then he came down again. He thrust his ears forward. Then he lay flat with his ears buried in his back and lay still. With a great yell Little Michael darted forward imitating a dog barking and the rabbit scurried away in short sharp leaps. Only his white tail was visible in the grey light.

Little Michael went into the next field, but the sheep were nowhere to be seen. He stood on a hillock and called out " Chowin, chowin," three times. Then he heard " Mah-m-m-m " in the next field and ran on. The sheep were in the last two fields, two oblong little fields, running in a hollow between two crags, surrounded by high thick fences, the walls of an old fort. In the nearest of the two fields he found ten of the sheep, standing side by side, looking at him, with their fifteen lambs in front of them also looking at him curiously. He counted them out loud and then he saw that the black sheep was not there. He panted with excitement. Perhaps she already had a lamb in the next field. He hurried to the gap leading into the next field, walking stealthily, avoiding the spots where the grass was high, so as to make less noise. It was bad to disturb a sheep that was lambing. He peered through a hole in the fence and could see nothing. Then he crawled to the gap and peered around the corner. The black sheep was just inside standing with her fore feet on a little mound.

Her belly was swollen out until it ended on each side in a sharp point and her legs appeared to be incapable of supporting her body. She turned her head sharply and listened. Little Michael held his breath, afraid to make a noise. It was of vital importance not to disturb the sheep. Straining back to lie down he burst a button on his trousers and he knew his braces were undone. He said, " Oh, you devil," again and decided to ask his mother to let him wear a belt instead of braces, same as Little Jimmy wore. Then he crawled farther back from the gap and taking off his braces altogether made them into a belt. It hurt his hips, but he felt far better and manly.

Then he came back again to the gap and looked. The black sheep was still in the same place. She was scratching the earth with her fore feet and going round in a circle, as if she wanted to lie down but was afraid to lie down. Sometimes she ground her teeth and made an awful noise, baring her jaws and turning her head round sideways. Little Michael felt a pain in his heart in pity for her, and he wondered why the other sheep didn't come to keep her company. Then he wondered whether his mother had felt the same pain when she had Ethna the autumn before. She must have, because the doctor was there.

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Suddenly the black sheep went on her knees. She stayed a few seconds on her knees and then she moaned and sank to the ground and stretched herself out with her neck on the little hillock and her hind quarters falling down the little slope. Little Michael forgot about the pain now. His heart thumped with excitement. He forgot to breathe, looking intently. " Ah," he said. The sheep stretched again and struggled to her feet and circled round once stamping and grinding her teeth. Little Michael moved up to her slowly. She looked at him anxiously, but she was too sick to move away.

He broke the bladder and he saw two little feet sticking out. He seized them carefully and pulled. The sheep moaned again and pressed with all her might. The lamb dropped on the grass.

Little Michael sighed with delight and began to rub its body with his finger nails furiously. The sheep turned around and smelt it, making a funny happy noise in its throat. The lamb, its white body covered with yellow slime, began to move, and presently it tried to stand up, but it fell again and Little Michael kept rubbing it, sticking his fingers into its ears and nostrils to clear them. He was so intent on this work that he did not notice the sheep had moved away again, and it was only when the lamb was able to stand up and he wanted to give it suck, that he noticed the sheep was lying again giving birth to another lamb. " Oh, you devil," gasped Little Michael, " six pancakes."

The second lamb was white like the first but with a black spot on its right ear. Little Michael rubbed it vigorously, pausing now and again to help the first lamb to its feet as it tried to stagger about. The sheep circled around making low noises in her throat, putting her nostrils to each lamb in turn, stopping nowhere, as giddy as a young schoolgirl, while the hard pellets of earth that stuck to her belly jingled like beads when she moved. Little Michael then took the first lamb and tried to put it to suck, but it refused to take the teat, stupidly sticking its mouth into the wool. Then he put his finger in its mouth and gradually got the teat in with his other hand. Then he pressed the teat and the hot milk squirted into the lamb's mouth. The lamb shook its tail, shrugged its body, made a little drive with its head and began to suck.

Little Michael was just going to give the second lamb suck, when the sheep moaned and moved away again. He said " chowin, chowin, poor chowin," and put the lamb to her head, but she turned away moaning and grinding her teeth and stamping. " Oh, you devil," said Little Michael, " she is going to have another lamb."

The sheep lay down again, with her foreleg stretched out in front of her and, straining her neck backwards, gave birth to a third lamb, a black lamb.

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Then she rose smartly to her feet, her two sides hollow now. She shrugged herself violently and, without noticing the lambs, started to eat grass fiercely, just pausing now and again to say "mah-m-m-m."

Little Michael, in an ecstasy of delight, rubbed the black lamb until it was able to stand. Then he put all the lambs to suck, the sheep eating round her in a circle, without changing her feet, smelling a lamb now and again. "Oh, you devil," Little Michael kept saying, thinking he would be quite famous now, and talked about for a whole week. It was not every day that a sheep had three lambs.

He brought them to a sheltered spot under the fence. He wiped the birth slime from his hands with some grass. He opened his penknife and cut the dirty wool from the sheep's udder, lest the lambs might swallow some and die. Then he gave a final look at them, said, "Chowin, chowin," tenderly and turned to go.

He was already at the gap when he stopped with a start. He raced back to the lambs and examined each of them. "Three she lambs," he gasped. "Oh, you devil, that never happened before. Maybe father will give me half-a-crown."

And as he raced homeward, he barked like a dog in his delight.

* * *

LET A MAN TAKE HEDE

To grinde the teethe, to whistle, to make pitiful cries . . . We must also beware we do not sing, and specially alone, if we have an untuneable voice, which is a common fault with moste men: And yet, hee that is of nature least apt unto it, doth use it moste . . .

Let a man take hede, hee does not begrease his fingers so deepe that he befyle the napkins too much: for it is an ill sight to see it: neither is it good manner, to rubbe your gresie fingers uppon the bread you must eate . . . And in like manner, to rise up where other men doe sit and talke, and to walke up and downe the chamber, it is no point of good manner . . .

Theis fasions to, must be left, that some men use, do sing betwene the teeth or play the dromme with their fingers, or shoofle theire feet: For these demeanours shewe that a body is carelesse of any man ells.

Counsels on etiquette
by a Sixteenth Century Italian Archbishop

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LOVE POTION

"Au revoir," said the old man

by JOHN COLLIER

ALAN AUSTEN, as nervous as a kitten, went up certain dark and creaky stairs in the neighbourhood of Pell Street, and peered about for a long time on the dim landing before he found the name he wanted written obscurely on one of the doors.

He pushed open this door, as he had been told to do, and found himself in a tiny room, which contained no furniture but a plain kitchen table, a rocking-chair, and an ordinary chair. On one of the dirty buff-coloured walls were two shelves, containing in all perhaps a dozen bottles and jars.

An old man sat in the rocking-chair, reading a newspaper. Alan, without a word, handed him the card he had been given. "Sit down, Mr. Austen," said the old man very politely. "I am glad to make your acquaintance."

"Is it true," asked Alan, "that you have a certain mixture that has—er—quite extraordinary effects?"

"My dear sir," replied the old man, "my stock in trade is not very large—I don't deal in laxatives and teething mixtures—but such as it is, it is varied. I think nothing I sell has effects which could be precisely described as ordinary."

"Well, the fact is—" began Alan.

"Here, for example," interrupted the old man, reaching for a bottle from the shelf. "Here is a liquid, colourless, almost tasteless, quite imperceptible in coffee, milk, wine, or any other beverage. It is also quite imperceptible to any known method of autopsy."

"Do you mean it is a poison?" cried Alan, very much horrified.

"Call it a glove-cleaner if you like," said the old man indifferently. "Maybe it will clean gloves. I have never tried. One might call it a life-cleaner. Lives need cleaning sometimes."

"I want nothing of that sort," said Alan.

"Probably it is just as well," said the old man. "Do you know the price of this? For one teaspoonful, which is sufficient, I ask a thousand pounds. Never less. Not a penny less."

"I hope all your mixtures are not as expensive," said Alan apprehensively.

"Oh dear, no," said the old man. "It would be no good charging

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that sort of price for a love potion, for example. Young people who need a love potion very seldom have a thousand pounds. Otherwise they would not need a love potion."

"I am glad to hear that," said Alan.

"I look at it like this," said the old man. "Please a customer with one article, and he will come back when he needs another. Even if it *is* more costly. He will save up for it, if necessary."

"So," said Alan, "you really do sell love potions?"

"If I did not sell love potions," said the old man, reaching for another bottle, "I should not have mentioned the other matter to you. It is only when one is in a position to oblige that one can afford to be so confidential."

"And these potions," said Alan. "They are not just—er—"

"Oh, no," said the old man. "Their effects are permanent, and extend far beyond the mere casual impulse. But they include it. Oh, yes, they include it. Bountifully, insistently. Everlastingly."

"Dear me!" said Alan, attempting a look of scientific detachment. "How very interesting!"

"But consider the spiritual side," said the old man.

"I do, indeed," said Alan.

"For indifference," said the old man, "they substitute devotion. For scorn, adoration. Give one tiny measure of this to the young lady—its flavour is imperceptible in orange juice, soup, or cocktails—and however gay and giddy she is, she will change altogether. She will want nothing but solitude, and you."

"I can hardly believe it," said Alan. "She is so fond of parties."

"She will not like them any more," said the old man. "She will be afraid of the pretty girls you may meet."

"Actually be jealous?" cried Alan, in a rapture. "Of me?"

"Yes, she will want to be everything to you."

"She is, already. Only she doesn't care about it."

"She will, when she has taken this. She will care intensely. You will be her sole interest in life."

"Wonderful!" cried Alan.

"She will want to know all you do," said the old man. "All that has happened to you during the day. Every word of it. She will want to know what you are thinking about, why you smile suddenly, why you are looking sad."

"That is love!" cried Alan.

"Yes," said the old man. "How carefully she will look after you! She will never allow you to be tired, to sit in a draught, to neglect your food. If you are an hour late, she will be terrified. She will think you are killed, or that some siren has caught you."

"I can hardly imagine Diana like that!" cried Alan, overwhelmed with joy.

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"You will not have to use your imagination," said the old man. "And, by the way, since there are always sirens, if by any chance you *should*, later on, slip a little, you need not worry. She will forgive you, in the end. She will be terribly hurt, of course, but she will forgive you—in the end."

"That will not happen," said Alan fervently.

"Of course not," said the old man. "But, if it did, you need not worry. She would never divorce you. Oh, no! And, of course, she herself will never give you the least, the very least, grounds for —uneasiness."

"And how much," said Alan, "is this wonderful mixture?"

"It is not as dear," said the old man, "as the glove-cleaner, or life-cleaner, as I sometimes call it. No. That is a thousand pounds, never a penny less. One has to be older than you are to indulge in that sort of thing. One has to save up for it."

"But the love potion?" said Alan.

"Oh, that," said the old man, opening the drawer in the kitchen table, and taking out a tiny, rather dirty-looking phial. "That is just five shillings."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am," said Alan, watching him fill it.

"I like to oblige," said the old man. "Then customers come back, later in life, when they are rather better off, and want more expensive things. Here you are. You will find it very effective."

"Thank you again," said Alan. "Good-bye."

"*Au revoir*," said the old man.

* * *

THE PHILOSOPHER

A man who had just moved into a small town fell into conversation with an old Quaker sitting on a bench in the square.

"What kind of people live here?" asked the newcomer.

"What manner of people didst thou live amongst before?"

"Oh, they were mean, narrow, suspicious, and very unfair."

"I am sorry, friend, but thou wilt find the same manner of people here."

Not long afterwards the old Quaker was accosted by another man who had come to live in the town.

"What sort of people are they here?" asked the stranger.

"What manner of people didst thou live amongst before?"

"The finest folk in the world. Friendly, kind and lovable. I hated to leave them."

"Thou wilt find the same manner of people here, then," beamed the wise old man.

Magazine Digest, Toronto

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FIDDLE-DE-DEE

He was a fiddler, and consequently a rogue

JONATHAN SWIFT, *in a letter to Stella, July*, 1711

Brown fiddle, you are a gypsy !
That proud still song—that Brahms—
That was not you :
I saw you lying warm
Against Rigo's throat . . .
Fringed petticoat
Like a red wing of lightning,
flash of gold garters
on a bare brown knee . . .
That
That was you—
Wine-breasted gypsy fiddle !

HENRY BELLAMANN

Strings For Ever

" I can well bring back to my mind," said Mr. Penny, " what I said to poor Joseph Ryme (who took the tribble part in High-Story Church for two-and-forty year) when they thought of having clar'nets there. ' Joseph,' I said, says I, ' depend upon't, if so be you have them tooting clar'nets you'll spoil the whole set-out. Clar'nets were not made for the service of Providence ; you can see it by looking at 'em,' I said . . . "

" As far as look is concerned," said the tranter, " I don't for my part see that a fiddle is much nearer heaven than a clar'net. 'Tis farther off. There's always a rakish, scampish countenance about a fiddle that seems to say the Wicked One had a hand in making o'en ; while angels be supposed to play clar'nets in heaven, or som'at like 'em, if ye may believe picters."

" Robert Penny, you were in the right," broke in the eldest Dewy. " They should ha' stuck to strings. Your brass-man, is brass—well and good ; your reed-man, is reed—well and good ; your percussion-man, is percussion—good again. But I don't care who hears me say it, nothing will speak to your heart wi' the sweetness of the man of strings ! "

" Strings for ever ! " said little Jimmy.

THOMAS HARDY, 1840-1928, *Under the Greenwood Tree*

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Rilloby-Rill

Grasshoppers four a-fiddling went,
Heigh-ho ! never be still !
They earned but little towards their rent,
But all day long with their elbows bent
They fiddled a tune called Rilloby-rilloby,
Fiddled a tune called Rilloby-rill.

Grasshoppers soon on Fairies came,
Heigh-ho ! never be still !
Fairies asked with a manner of blame,
" Where do you come from, what is your name ?
What do you want with your Rilloby-rilloby,
What do you want with your Rilloby-rill ? "

" Madam, you see before you stand,
Heigh-ho ! never be still !
The Old Original Favourite Grand
Grasshopper's Green Herbarian Band,
And the tune we play is Rilloby-rilloby,
Madam, the tune is Rilloby-rill."

Fairies hadn't a word to say,
Heigh-ho ! never be still !
Fairies seldom are sweet by day,
But the Grasshoppers merrily fiddled away,
O but they played with a willoby-rilloby,
O but they played with a willoby-rill !

Fairies slumber and sulk at noon,
Heigh-ho ! never be still !
But at last the kind old motherly moon
Brought them dew in a silver spoon,
And they turned to ask for Rilloby-rilloby,
One more round of Rilloby-rill.

Ah ! but nobody now replied,
Heigh-ho ! never be still !
When day went down the music died,
Grasshoppers four lay side by side,
And there was an end of their Rilloby-rilloby,
There was an end of their Rilloby-rill.

HENRY NEWBOLT, 1862-1938

Testimonial

He could fiddle all the bugs off a sweet-potato-vine . . .

STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT, *The Mountain Whippoorwill*

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The Evil One

A poor young girl, who dwelt with her parents and four brothers near the edge of a great forest, fell in love with a noble huntsman who often visited the district. But the stranger took no notice of her and, in despair, she called upon the Devil for help. Satan appeared and handed her a mirror, saying, "Get your beloved to gaze into this glass and he will be yours for ever." Some days later the huntsman passed on his way to the forest, and the girl placed herself in his path and held the mirror towards him. The young man glanced into it and exclaimed in horror, "This is magic. I have seen the Evil One!" Turning, he fled from the place and did not return.

Days passed and the girl grew more and more despondent and, at last, she again called upon the Devil. He soon appeared and listened to her story. "Do not trouble yourself," he said. "You have both looked into the mirror and so you belong to me. But I will help you to attain your heart's desire if you will give me your four brothers." The maiden was so mad with longing that she consented to the Devil's demands. He took the four lads and turned them into four strings of different thicknesses. Then he said, "I must have your father." The girl made no demur and Satan took the man and changed him into a wooden box. From this he fashioned the body of a fiddle. "Now," said the Devil, "I must have your mother." "Take her," answered the girl . . . Satan then turned the mother into a small stick and, by fastening her hair to either end of it, made a bow. With this he played a tune on the fiddle, and, handing it to the girl, told her to make music and the huntsman would come to her.

As soon as the Evil One had disappeared the girl played a melody upon the violin. Within a few moments the young huntsman came along the road, took her into his arms, and carried her away with him. For nine days they were happy together and then the Devil came and dragged them off to hell. The girl dropped the fiddle and it fell into some bushes where it was found by a wandering Gypsy. The Devil was content to let the Gypsy keep the instrument, for he knew that its music would always lure souls into his net.

Transylvanian Legend, told by FREDERICK COWLES
in Gypsy Caravan

Happy Release

I was much distressed by next door people who had twin babies and played the violin: but one of the twins died, and the other has eaten the fiddle—so all is peace.

EDWARD LEAR, *in a letter, January,* 1862

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★*A new novel by the author of "Rogue Male" is an outstanding literary event, and* ARGOSY *is delighted to have secured first publication rights of this vigorous and inventive new story. In "A Rough Shoot" Geoffrey Household is very much on his own ground. After spending the whole War in the army as an Intelligence Officer, he settled in Dorset, the scene of this story, where he used to shoot regularly over a farm very like Blossom's. We can recommend this story for plausibility and for sheer headlong excitement; and, were they not able—and more than ready—to speak for themselves, the credible, lively and exceedingly diverting characters.*

The First Part of

A ROUGH SHOOT

by GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

IT all began on an autumn evening so silent and peaceful that no one who had the luck to be out of doors, with copse and downland stretching away from him till the folds of England vanished into a mist of grey and green, could have a thought of human violence. We had had two weeks of storm, and then came this Tuesday, the 18th October, which belonged to late summer. All the life of grass and hedgerow was too busy satisfying hunger to be on guard. I didn't fire a shot the whole afternoon—not for lack of opportunity, but because I wanted to see what game I had on the shoot and what were its movements if undisturbed.

I had rented very cheaply the rough shooting over four hundred and fifty acres of a remote Dorset farm. The sport wouldn't have appealed to a man who liked driven pheasants or to a syndicate who expected the mixed bag to pay for their week-end. You had to work for your game. But on a favourable afternoon, if your liver and eyes were in good order—for it was speed that counted—you might come home with a brace of partridges, a hare, and of course all the rabbits you cared to kill. I shot purely for the pot, and anything I didn't want I left for another day. I didn't even use a dog. That will horrify the purist, but I would assure him that I seldom blazed away at the improbable, and that a bird which I couldn't retrieve myself was rare.

I only went up to the shoot on Saturday afternoons. Everybody

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knew that. Blossom, who was the tenant farmer, would have sworn to it, and I dare say that later he did. This Tuesday evening visit was due to accidents: that I had a slack afternoon at the office: that my gun happened to be at the gunsmith's, waiting to be picked up: and that the weather promised a glorious hour before the sudden autumn twilight.

I didn't use my gun and I moved around the shoot silently and for the most part under cover. I wanted to know the permanent population and its taste in feeding grounds. A little before sunset I established myself in the thick boundary hedge, whence I had an excellent view of four other hedges and a long, warm slope of down.

Blossom's farm was long and narrow, running roughly north and south. Down the centre was the level, bare watershed. The western slope was sharp, dropping to water meadows and a busy road; its short turf was dotted with clumps of thorn, gorse and bramble so thick that even hounds were baffled, and the foxes and rabbits kept up the balance of nature undisturbed. The eastern slope was slight, and fell away gradually to the boundary hedge, which, in places, was a jungle twenty feet thick. To the south was a hill-top barn and outhouses, and beyond them a few primmer, kinder meadows.

I stayed on in the hedge till dusk, watching the movements of a flock of pigeons. There wasn't a soul about. Ploughing was over, and there would be little work on the slopes until the kale came to be cut for winter feed and the sheep were folded on the roots.

At right angles to the boundary hedge was another, which had thrown out great domes and bastions of bramble. I was astonished to see, appearing from the curve of one of these bushes, the seat of a generous pair of trousers. The man was apparently pegging something down just inside the hedge, and working with his back towards me. He half turned, and laid on the turf some sort of spike with a broad head.

Of course my mind leapt at once to rabbit traps; but when at last the man stood up, I saw that he wasn't a farm labourer, and wasn't dressed like a person who would be interested in rabbits. The expanse of cloth which he had persistently presented to me was town trouser.

If he were poaching, I thought, he ought to have either a dog or a companion. I looked more carefully into the dusk, and, sure enough, I found the companion. He was standing quite motionless on the top of the bank, under and against an ivy-covered oak, whence he could see for a quarter of a mile on all sides of him. His disciplined stillness had its reward. A cock pheasant flew up to roost in the opposite tree. The trapper in the hedge saw it, drew an air pistol from his pocket, and shot it neatly down.

This made me unduly angry. I wouldn't have minded a bit if they had been local villagers out for next Sunday's dinner, but from their clothes I knew they were not. Somehow I got it into my head that they were commercial poachers, come all the way from London or Bournemouth to supply the black market.

The watcher on the bank looked down at the ping of the shot.

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He hardly spoke above a whisper, but gave the impression of being almost hysterical with petty annoyance. The man with the air pistol said something obviously rude, picked up the pheasant and returned to his job. He continued to work with his back to me, and still presented his broad and perfect target.

The temptation was too great. I didn't want the bother of handing them over to the law—supposing I could catch them—but I did want to teach them a lesson. The range was about eighty yards, far enough, I thought, to hurt but to do no damage that a probe and a little disinfectant couldn't cure. I let him have a charge of No. 5 shot in the seat of the pants.

I talk lightly of this shocking brutality, but my conscience was and is appalled by the result. He straightened himself with a jerk, completely off balance as if he were diving from a springboard, and crashed heavily to the ground. He kicked twice and lay still, his face and shoulders on the thorns of the blackberry bush. His companion jumped down the far side of the bank and bolted across country with no thought but for his own safety. I didn't call to him to stop. I was paralysed by the shock of what I had done. And there was little doubt of it. No man who had life in him would lie in that position.

I DON'T know how long I stared at him, perhaps ten seconds, perhaps twenty—a stillness which was partly horror and partly habit, acquired in war, of not giving my cover away. Then I dashed out of the hedge, taking a smack over the eye from an ash sapling, and ran to him.

I didn't move the body at first, fearing, impossible though it seemed, that I had damaged the spine. I raised his coat, cut the waist-band of his trousers and tore them down the seam. The pattern of the shot was regular and very shallow, and exactly where it ought to have been.

Then I turned him over, and understood. He was like the men in the Bible. He had fallen on his sword. One of the broad-headed spikes had been lying on the ground, point uppermost like a giant thumb-tack, and the round, shiny metal base was now pinned, a crimson-bordered decoration, to his left breast.

Instinctively I took hold to pull it out. Then a sort of panic reason took command and I let go, and wiped my finger-prints off it with his coat. Then I thought: *Oh Lord, they'll spot that somebody has wiped it!* And after that my imagination took me through an entire dialogue with the police.

That damned bruise on my eye. Signs of a struggle. You shot at him. Then he struck you. You lost your temper and stabbed him. How did the dead man's clothes come to be torn? A wound of the spine, you thought! Ah, trying to make it manslaughter instead of murder, are you? Have you a respect for human life, Mr. Taine? Yes, profound. In the war you won a D.C.M. as a corporal, I believe? Yes, I did. How many men did you kill on that occasion? Damn you, do you suppose I counted them? You

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had further decorations after you were commissioned? Yes, I did. You seem to have enjoyed this single-handed stuff? I hated it, but my chaps were about all in. Come, come, Mr. Taine . . .

Well, no doubt I exaggerated. Perhaps some proofs could have been discovered by examination of the ground that my story was true. Perhaps I should never have been in the dock on a charge of murder. But most certainly I was guilty of manslaughter.

Now, if I am to explain properly the panic I was in, and what I did, I must tell a little about myself. My name is Roger Taine. I am thirty-four, with a family and no capital. I have a good job as Dorset agent for a big quarry combine, producing cement, roofing tiles, special bricks, stone for building and gravel for roads, and all sorts of by-products that interest an up-to-date architect or county surveyor. What with commission and salary, I've no complaints; but my family, of course, has no security beyond my own earning power.

So, as I stood over the corpse and watched the dark shadow—in a dusk already too deep to distinguish colour—spreading over his clothes from beneath the head of that gigantic thumb-tack, I passed from the police interrogation to what the judge would say. Shooting a harmless poacher as if I were some callous county magnate a hundred and fifty years ago. At the best, criminally negligent. At the worst, a savage sadist from whom society must be protected. Make an example of him. Five years.

I couldn't expect to get less, and I deserved it. But when you have a family it's not so much the sentence which counts as the result of it. I'm not one of your go-getters. A small post as a clerk with some charitable firm would be all I could hope for—and there, for the rest of my life, I should remain.

After hearing the judge's remarks, I had no doubt at all that there weren't going to be any judge's remarks if I could help it. There was no one about. The dead man's companion had cleared out without ever seeing me or even knowing where the shot came from. I caught a glimpse of him bolting over the skyline towards a lonely road which ran across the downs some five hundred yards from Blossom's boundary, and then I saw the lights of a car gather speed and go tearing northwards.

THE disposal of bodies, as anyone knows who reads the Sunday papers, is not easy; sooner or later they turn up. I could not hope to find a permanent solution then and there. He was too heavy to carry far, and I had no spade. The most I could do was to hide him, so that the man who ran away would assume, if he returned, that his companion had recovered and left. There was hardly any blood on the ground. No doubt police would have detected it, but it wasn't visible to a casual eye.

I strapped my game-bag over the wound and got him on my back. I was about to set off when it occurred to me that the traps were still in position. Was I to leave them or remove them? I put him down, and hunted about in the last of the light. There were

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no traps at all. I found a spirit-level, a foot-rule and three more of those murderous broad-headed spikes.

The sweat poured down my ribs. Had I shot at some harmless Post Office surveyor? But that didn't make sense. The wildest conjectures went through my head. Commando training? Broadcasting engineers? Some kind of official experiment? I had hoped, with an irresponsible, cowardly optimism that I suspect is shared by every criminal, that there would only be the most perfunctory search for my supposed poacher, or none at all. But now it was absolutely certain that it would be some employer's duty to make the most exhaustive enquiries.

It is curious how every animal, even a quarry agent, is a creature of habit. In the midst of this blinding mess, which should have excluded all other worries, I found time to be upset at the thought of returning home too late. My wife knew that I was up at the shoot, for I had telephoned from the town after leaving my office. She would be anxious when I didn't return at nightfall, and the children would catch her mood and refuse to go to sleep. I hated the thought of inventing some long and complicated lie. I never do lie to her. There's no reason for it.

That made me impatient, and over-anxious for a quick and temporary solution. I should have bicycled home, got out my car and taken the body a hundred miles away from my shoot. The following night when, for all I knew, the place might be teeming with policemen, it would be impossible. The bicycle I must explain. Partly to save petrol, but more to keep fit, I always bicycled to and from the office on days when I knew I wasn't going to need the car. And so that evening the bicycle was all I had.

I carried my burden half a mile along the top of the down, and dropped it, together with all its tools, into a rabbit warren. This was a hollow which must once have been a dew-pond or a flint pit. The steep sides were honeycombed with rabbit holes, so large and so close together that once when I climbed down to pick up a shot rabbit the earth gave way and I sank over the knees. It was an unsavoury spot, with the carcasses of half a dozen sheep at the bottom, which had died of disease and been thrown there to rot.

I stamped on the tunnels and galleries until the soil caved in. Then I laid the corpse in this irregular trench and lightly covered it. In the pockets and on the clothes there was nothing to prove identity—or at any rate nothing that I could see by the light of matches. I was careful to leave no smooth slope of new earth, and reckoned that there would be nothing suspicious to a casual eye.

I picked up my gun and returned to my bicycle, which was leaning against a haystack just off the upper road. On the way home I stopped at the edge of a fast stream and let the water run over my game-bag and my coat to dissolve the blood. It was nine o'clock when I got home, and, as I expected, Cecily was very worried. My lateness was inexplicable. If I had stopped at a pub or to see a friend on my way home, I should have telephoned. She knew, too,

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that I wouldn't willingly disappoint our two boys, who had been promised a long story before bedtime.

I told her that I had stayed very late looking for a dead bird, and that on the way back a tyre had punctured (which was true, for I had driven a pin into it just before reaching home), so I had had to walk. She gave me a silent, doubtful look once or twice in the evening, which meant that she knew there was trouble on my mind, and that she was too proud to ask for it.

NEXT day I awoke—if it can be called waking after such a night—with an atrocious, evil conscience. To prepare the way for my absence, I told Cecily that I intended to do a round of customers and prospects, and that, as I was going to be in the north of the county, I should call on my opposite number in Salisbury and stay the night. This was a perfectly normal routine; nevertheless, she asked me diffidently to call her from Salisbury just to say that I was all right. I tied my bicycle to the roof of the car—on the grounds that I couldn't be bothered to mend the puncture myself—and surreptitiously threw a spade into the back.

I told my clerk—there were only the two of us in the office—that I was going to do a round of visits, and that I shouldn't come back. Then I drove twice round the shoot through all the lanes and roads that were near to it. There was no sign at all of anything wrong, no cars parked on the roadside or in the cart tracks.

I dropped in on old Blossom, the farmer from whom I rented the shooting. We had a mug of cider together—he was one of the few men left in the county who still made his own—and talked of local affairs. He evidently hadn't been disturbed by police or anyone else. He mightn't have told me, of course, if he had; but I knew him well enough to recognize his manner when he was being heavily discreet.

As I drove out of Blossom's gate and over the stream, I passed a man standing on the roadside near the bridge. He looked brisk and important, like a fussy foreman on a job he didn't understand. In the ordinary way he would never have made me suspicious. Blossom's farm, the tall elms and the clear chalk stream made a pretty, if somewhat obvious picture that always attracted the holiday-making townsman. It was a bit late, however, for holidays, and it wasn't a week-end; and then the man was dressed as some minor, pestiferous government employee, yet had no vehicle in sight. I drove very slowly away, and watched him in the mirror. He was looking after my car; he wrote something, presumably its number, in a notebook. I pulled up a little farther on, and climbed a slope to observe him. He seemed to be making a sort of census of traffic. The vet. and the baker both stopped at the farm, and, as if glad of the opportunity, he asked them questions. His self-satisfaction was obvious, even from a distance.

I couldn't believe this little man was a policeman, or that his questions were police routine. If anyone had approached the Dorset Constabulary with some story, necessarily vague, of a man shot on

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Blossom's land, their very first move would be to interview Blossom and inspect the ground. They wouldn't put a plain-clothes detective on the job before they knew whether there was a word of truth in the yarn.

Somebody else, however, seemed to have acted quickly, and this was obviously a warning that some sort of investigation was going on. My simple plan had to be scrapped. I couldn't risk leaving my car anywhere near the shoot, under possible observation, while I dug up the body and carried it back.

I drove on and lunched very late at a remote pub overlooking the Blackmoor Vale, where the landlord, who was a friend of mine, always had something solid to eat which food controllers had never heard of. I was amazed at my appetite, and ashamed—but then I realized that my mind, all unknown to me, had been making deductions. Somebody was as yet unwilling to call in the police; and that could only mean that my shot was—well, not justified from any legal or moral point of view, but at least the sort of accident that did occur in the world to which the dead man had belonged. The instancy of his companion's escape bore it out. Why run, unless he had a guilty conscience or had been prepared to be shot at?

So my conscience was easier, and I was strongly tempted to leave well alone; but then I should be at the mercy of the merest accident all through the winter—Blossom's inquisitive sheep-dogs, the rain or the rabbits themselves. On the other hand, the body could no longer be removed by road. The only solution was to find a better hiding place on the shoot itself.

It wasn't going to be easy. Hedges and coverts were thick with all the dying vegetation of summer, and I couldn't dig in such stuff without leaving a patch of beaten ground which would be conspicuous to any determined searcher. Digging in the open and levelling off so that nothing suspicious remained was, at any rate at night, quite impossible. Then it occurred to me, in my after-lunch meditation, that I needn't do either.

In the north-east corner of the shoot, at the top of the boundary hedge, was a tumbledown piece of dry stone walling which had once surrounded a barn or cottage, and now contained only a clump of beeches and a jungle of brambles. On the south side, just off Blossom's land, was a field which had been freshly ploughed and harrowed. I intended to pull down a short stretch of wall, dig a shallow hole and replace the stones when I had finished. The earth could be scattered on the new-turned earth of the field, and raked over with a branch, and, if the job were neatly done, the two persons most concerned could rest in peace.

In the afternoon I drove back along the upper road and still saw nothing to disquiet me. I stopped for an instant to hide the spade in a ditch where I could pick it up later. Then I put my car in the public car park and collected my bicycle at the little shop which had mended the puncture.

After dusk I approached the shoot, very cautiously and without lights, along the upper road. I was prepared to give up the whole plan if I passed a single stranger, but I didn't. For three miles,

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without either village or cottage, this narrow, well-metalled by-road switchbacked up and down across the high ground. There were several ways of scrambling across country from the road to Blossom's land, but only one regular track—if you can call a couple of ruts in the grass a track.

I carefully reconnoitred the point where the track met the road. The man who ran away had taken this route the previous night. By bending close to the ground I could just make out the print of tyres in the mud where his car had been parked. Then I rode on up the road, picked up the spade, hid my bicycle and worked my way silently across the fields to the clump of beeches and the wall.

It was a gusty night, with thin clouds whose lower edge occasionally touched the top of the downs and enveloped them in mist. The trees within the wall creaked and whispered, and the thorn and holly and elder of the great hedge rattled their branches and dying leaves. There was enough noise to cover any that I might make.

One by one I removed the flat stones of the wall, placing them on the bare earth of the field so that I would know in what order they went back. While I worked I had my back towards the length of the boundary hedge, and I can't say I liked it. With my back unguarded, with such a beastly task in front of me, and in not too deep a darkness, across which flitted the wisps and wraiths of cloud, I had to keep a tight hold on imagination.

I kept too tight a hold. Any balance was impossible. Either I had to investigate every cracking branch, every inexplicable sound, or none at all. And so it was that I didn't pay attention until the final rush of feet.

I ascribe my safety to sheer animal panic, for I am no athlete. All my suppressed fears exploded instantaneously and I jumped sideways and off, like a hare out of her form. As my pursuers stumbled over the stones, I increased a lead of five yards to twenty. I led them towards the road and then dived—literally dived—head first over a gap in the hedge which I knew was closed by five strands of barbed wire. They crashed into it as I picked myself up, and gave tongue loudly in oaths that certainly weren't those of local men.

There were two of them. One had a cultured accent, and a loud and hearty voice. The other was a foreigner. Their speed and energy made me certain that neither was the man I had seen at Blossom's gate. Dense cloud was moving over the ground, and in that foggy darkness I could get no impression at all of height or build. It was a comforting thought that to them, too, I must have been nothing but a piece of night which moved.

By the time they got clear of the wire and were able to listen to anything but themselves, I was safe. I dropped to the ground and waited. One of them produced a torch that he hadn't had time to use before, and flashed it half-heartedly around. I noticed that he held it away from him at the full stretch of his arm. It was obvious that he thought I might fire at the light.

They gave up the search for me and returned to the wall. There, of course, they found my spade and walked off with it. That was a

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disaster. There would be some wonderful sets of my finger-prints on that spade. The Englishman said to the other, "Hold it by the blade, man!" So that was that, and the end of me if ever they chose to go to the police. I could never produce any convincing story to explain what I was doing there with a spade.

They walked away diagonally across the fields, aiming—I had to gamble on it—for the cart track. As soon as I was sure, I ran straight to my bicycle, tore silently up the road and reached the junction a little before them. They had no waiting car. They turned left and walked along the stretch of road I had just covered, one of them carrying the spade over his shoulder and still holding it by the blade. I followed, trailing them by the sound of their footsteps.

When they got over the brow of the hill I decided to take a chance. The road was good and my cycle well oiled. It made no more noise than dead leaves blowing over the tarmac. They were talking together as I swept down behind them, and when they heard me it was too late. I passed them at about fifteen miles an hour, swerved, grabbed at the spade and wobbled twice across the road—but I had it, and the torch was flashed too late. I heard them begin to run, and I put on speed.

Further on I came to a motor cycle and sidecar, parked just off the road without lights. I don't suppose anyone else would have noticed it, but I was looking for their transport, and I knew all the gates and widenings where it could be. I had about a couple of minutes to deal with it. I caught carburettor and petrol pipe a devastating swipe with the spade, wrenched off the clutch cable, and then saw a handy billet of wood with which I wrecked the spokes of the back wheel. I lost my temper with that motor cycle, and I left it looking as if I had. Then I rode peacefully back to Dorchester, recovered my car, and was home before midnight with a story that I hadn't had to stay the night at Salisbury after all.

IT is now time to say something of my silent Cecily. She seldom says what she thinks. On the other hand, unless she is talking to fools who expect it of her, she never says what she doesn't think. This apparent quiescence—a reluctance, one might call it, to disturb the *status quo*—makes her very easy to live with: too easy, perhaps, for I am inclined to accept her longer silences without enquiring into the cause so closely as I ought.

Such masculine laziness was now useful. I could pretend I didn't notice her mood. She, on her part, was much too proud to ask me the reason for my odd behaviour two nights running. I don't want to give the impression that I had to explain all my movements to her. No, I mean that ours was as good a marriage as you could find. If I were anxious or excited, she always knew it; if it were she who went through some silent crisis, I usually knew it. But we were both quite capable of feigning to see nothing wrong until the cloud over the other, whatever it was, had passed.

This peace which she created in our home helped me through the next forty-eight hours. When Cecily found a report in Thurs-

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day's evening paper of an abandoned motor cycle on the upper road, which had had its number plates removed and seemed to have been in a smash, I was able to grunt and answer, with complete lack of interest, that I supposed it was stolen. I wanted, of course, day and night, to go up to the shoot and see that the rabbits in their pit were undisturbed, but, somehow, I managed to control myself until the week-end.

On Saturday I took a full day off, and went over the ground as naturally and determinedly as if I were being watched all the time. I was careful not to go straight to the pit. When at last I did go there, in the normal course of walking the length of the down for a hare, the slope looked so natural that I wondered at my fears.

I sat down and ate my sandwiches at the top of the shoot, and as I let my eyes wander over the loved, familiar rise and fall of the land, I became aware that there was a question to be put to it. Those two men who nearly caught me—what were they doing in the north-east corner of the shoot? I was sure I hadn't made enough noise to attract them. Then suppose that they were not looking for me at all, were on their way back to the road. On their way back from what?

I found enough of their tracks to prove that they had come from the west, along a cattle-proof hedge that divided Blossom's down. Close to the hedge were dense, rounded thickets of bramble that looked like the huts of a Kaffir kraal. They repeated so exactly those domes and bastions where the dead man had been at work, that I wondered if the same mysterious activity might not have been carried on.

On my way home I felt, with a vague soldier's instinct, that the clue to the action must be found in the lie of the land. Yet never was there a more innocent patch of geography. Before me, to the south, was a great semicircle of rolling country, ending in the coastal hills. The smooth hog's back where I was gave no impression of height, and rose so gradually that it was not conspicuous or in any way a landmark; it was merely the highest point in a green bowl of farms and villages—level, spacious and remote.

A WEEK passed and nothing happened. I could almost accept an unexpected ring at the door bell with equanimity. The weather was vile. There were two days of gale with torrents of rain, and then a thick fog came up from the Channel. This suited me well. I went on foot to the pit, not even risking a bicycle in case it should be seen and recognized, and created the appearance of a landslip which had dragged a thorn tree loose from its roots. Thereafter the spot was covered by enough earth and tangled vegetation to discourage man or dog.

The following Saturday afternoon I went out again with my gun, and came on old Blossom and one of his men carting hay from a stack in the southern meadows. He called me over when I shouted a good afternoon, and on the other side of the cart I found his landlord, Robert Heyne-Hassingham. Blossom introduced me as the man who had taken his shooting, and Heyne-Hassingham at once turned on the charm.

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He had plenty of it, part hereditary and part acquired as a practising politician. He was an excellent landlord and a man of considerable influence in the county—indeed, in all the west of England. During the war he had been chosen, it was said, as the underground leader for a very wide area in the event of a successful German invasion.

After the war, however, he became a slightly comic figure to the average stolid citizen, for he began to take politics as seriously as any ardent socialist. He founded the People's Union which had a lot of publicity till the newspapers grew tired of it. It was a sort of Boys' Brigade for grown-ups, full of Ideals, Service and Religion—any religion would do. It appealed to disgruntled ex-servicemen, and was supposed to have a following among regular officers of the Army and Navy—a threat that we hadn't known since Cromwell's day—but to the plain Englishman, who keeps his Ideals, Service and Religion packed away in the gun-room, well-oiled and ready for use but emphatically out of reach of the children, the People's Union was offensive.

It had a somewhat fascist smell of hierarchy. It paid lip-service to democracy, of course, but there was no doubt that if Heyne-Hassingham and his choir-boys ever came to power—which no one thought remotely possible but themselves—Parliament would be even more of a rubber stamp than it is.

As I say, he turned on the charm. He discussed gun and game, talked of old days when his father and the gamekeepers had brought up thousands of pheasants by hand, and asked me if I thought the pheasant was establishing itself successfully as a purely wild bird. I had no doubt that it was.

He knew his countryside, though I had the impression that he was entertaining me with what he had heard rather than what he had observed. That thin, rather ascetic face didn't really belong to our wealth of slow life.

"Your grandfather was a great friend of our family, Colonel Taine," he said.

"Mr. Taine," I corrected him.

Inverted snobbery, I suppose. But it's ridiculous for an ordinary business man to go walking about as a colonel.

"I was only thinking," he smiled, "how proud the old boy would have been of a grandson who commanded his battalion and collected all your gongs on the way."

I didn't believe that my grandfather had any real connection with the Heyne-Hassinghams, except that he sold them a famous ram of his own breeding. Grandfather, if he visited their house at all, would certainly have made some memorable inroads on the Heyne-Hassingham cellar before parting with his ram.

"The country needs men like you," he said.

That was an invitation, but I wasn't having any.

"We *are* a bit short of plain, contented chaps," I answered.

"That is you?"

"It is."

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"You're rare, then, and you're very lucky," he said. "But, believe me, in too many other cases content grows into self-satisfaction."

He asked us both to stroll as far as his car with him, playing the busy man who did not want to part from agreeable company but had to account for every minute of his time. His conversation was now mostly with Blossom, and about the high down. In answer to his questions Blossom, I remember, told him that the growth of the grass had been disappointing that dry summer, and that he wasn't putting any cattle or sheep on the down till the spring.

Heyne-Hassingham asked if strangers ever wandered through that way, and was told they didn't. Then his attention seemed to be drawn by the swarms of rabbits, and he wanted to know if Blossom sold the trapping. Blossom did. All game above ground was mine, but a professional trapper paid a useful sum for the right to take game below ground. He usually spent four or five nights after Christmas clearing out the big warrens.

Heyne-Hassingham kept on with his cross-examination. He stayed in character as an interested landlord, but was persistent as any lawyer.

"Is there any illicit trapping by local bad lads?" he asked.

"Not if Mr. Taine don't. 'E should larn, 'e should! Bit o' wire and 'is old breeches, that's all 'e needs. Comes cheaper than bangin' off fourpence!"

Blossom chuckled and puffled under his scarves and waistcoats, and gave me an enormous wink to assure me he wasn't to be taken seriously.

"Up here often at night?" Heyne-Hassingham enquired, as if carrying on the joke.

"I? Never."

This conversation made me uneasy. It might be innocent, but it was near enough to the bone to put me on my guard. And that was as well, for, when we came to the car, there was the handsome, nervous face which I had last seen staring, for a split second, at the dead companion in the bramble bush.

The man was leaning against Heyne-Hassingham's car with a rather too conscious grace. He was in his early forties, lean, hard and able. I think that even then I spotted him as the type of staff officer whom one most dislikes but from whom one cannot withhold respect. Heyne-Hassingham introduced him as Colonel Hiart.

"This is Mr. Taine," he said, "who rents the shooting up here."

There was a hardly perceptible note of mischief in his voice as he gave me my civilian title. He guessed just what I was going to think of Hiart, and let me know—if I were clever enough to see it—that the contrast between us amused him.

Hiart shook hands. His narrow, dark eyes were laid on me as directly and expressionlessly as the guns of a tank.

"Do you shoot?" I asked him.

"I fear," he said, "that I find it noisy and unnecessary."

"I'd find it unnecessary, too," I retorted, "if I still had army

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rations. But I must admit I enjoy it. I'll also admit that I think I ought not to."

That was a perfectly sincere remark. I wasn't acting. Afterwards, when I knew a little more of Hiart, I saw that I couldn't have answered better. He had intended deliberately to provoke some reaction, probably brutal, which would give him a line on my character. I wouldn't like to say what he made of the reaction that in fact he got, but he must have thought it unlikely that I was a man to shoot strangers and remove their bodies.

When the car had driven away and Blossom had returned to his hay-carting, I started to tramp through the roots for partridge. It was merely to put up a show of activity. The coveys were far too wild at the end of October to be walked up.

I was perplexed, and in the blackest depression. There wasn't a shadow of doubt that Heyne-Hassingham and his tame colonel had come over to Blossom's farm on a Saturday afternoon in the hope of finding me, that they considered me a possible suspect, and, alternatively, a possible ally.

Ally in what? That I couldn't answer. I was shocked and alarmed to discover that Heyne-Hassingham, prominent, patriotic and above suspicion, was connected with the runaway Hiart, with the violence of that nocturnal attempt on me, with a motor cycle so compromising that it had to be left abandoned and unclaimed.

WHEN I got home, there was further evidence that somebody was interested in my movements.

"Have you got a cigarette case that doesn't belong to you?" Cecily asked.

"No. Why?"

She said that a man had 'phoned and wanted to know if I had found his case. She replied that I hadn't told her anything, and asked him where he had lost it. When he dined with me the week before last, he said, and added: "Let's see. When was that?"

Now, this is a cautionary story for children on the virtue of never having secrets from one's wife. Cecily knew perfectly well that if I had dined with anyone at all, I should have come home full of it.

"Wednesday, of course," he said.

That disastrous Wednesday, October 19th. Any other wife, piqued at the fact that my doings had been exceptional and puzzling, would have eagerly swallowed the bait; but Cecily smelt something wrong with it.

"No," she had answered instinctively. "The only night he was out was Saturday."

She saw the relief in my face. It may be that she even heard a gasp of tension freed. "Darling," she asked anxiously, "you haven't . . . well . . . done anything against the law? But it's impossible."

I avoided the direct answer.

"He *was* trying to find out if I came home late that night," I said.

I told her, on the spur of the moment and very unconvincingly,

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that I was investigating a racket in building material for my firm. She accepted it, but she knew very well that I would have told her that much long before, even if I didn't give the details. And she knew that I knew. There was nothing whatever hidden from either of us, except a bit of prosaic fact.

Cecily went upstairs to put the children to bed, and I gave myself a stiff gin. It did so much good that I had two more. The evening story turned out to be rather more imaginative than usual.

I was always allowed a wild twenty minutes with the children after their bath and before they were finally tucked up. This period was spent in some romp or other—suppressed by Cecily if it promised to be too exciting for sleep—or in stories. My two sons, Jerry aged six and George aged five, had a taste, which I tried to satisfy, for improbabilities. Not fairies, but something near the shaggy dog story was what they liked. That night I started one about an ant's nest in the garden. When petrol was poured down the hole to destroy them, out they all came, saying thank-you-very-much and driving a communal car.

Cecily listened to the end of the story, and then we had supper in rather less silence than had been the custom for the last ten days. I warned her that if anyone seemed anxious to find out where I had been after dusk on the 18th and up to midnight on the 19th, she was to remember that I had been at home. And—as these people seemed clever at misusing the telephone—I suggested a code for our personal service. If I myself were on the telephone and I carried on with the ant story for the children, it meant that I was on this secret job, and she must be wary. Anyone purporting to give her a message from me would also mention ants.

IT was no good to worry, no good to break in any way from my routine. So I worked hard during the week, and took my Saturday afternoon as usual on the shoot. It was the fifth of November, two and a half weeks from the death of the unknown.

The warren was still undisturbed. So, apparently, were my nerves, for I shot a hare almost on the edge of the pit. Then I walked back the length of the down, getting nothing at all on the way, towards the stacks and richer fields at the southern end of the farm.

I was just turning into the track which led past the barn and down to the valley when, some way ahead of me, and on the other side of a gate, I saw a small, tweedy, sporty-looking man earnestly watching the long grass in front of him.

"Hi, you!" he shouted. "Stay just where you are!"

He accompanied this order with a cheerful wave of his stick, and made gestures with his free hand in the direction of the field. He doubled round the angle of the hedge and disappeared.

His commanding voice had sounded thoroughly friendly, so I obeyed. Then I saw him crash through one of Blossom's neatest fences, as if he had had a horse between his legs, and up got the partridges. He was astonishingly right in his judgment. They skimmed across my front into the turnips, and I got a quick right and

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left which must have looked quite showy from where he was standing.

"Thank you," I said when he came up. "How on earth did you know what they'd do on strange ground?"

"Brought up with 'em," he answered. "Liked 'em for breakfast. One for me, brace for father."

He was a fiery-looking little bouncer, about five and a half feet high, with a pointed face and a thin sandy moustache. There was a network of scars on one side of his chin, and he had a slight limp which suggested still another war wound. His age was unguessable—somewhere between forty and fifty-five. Whatever it was, he was undoubtedly fighting fit, and his movements were fast and jerky as those of a well-strung puppet.

We had a short conversation—one of those curious interchanges wherein nothing whatever is revealed but instant mutual sympathy. I found myself saying, "I can't offer you much sport, but if it would amuse you to join me up here any week-end, I'd be delighted."

It was a wildly impulsive offer, especially as I had every reason to be suspicious of strangers. But he was so obviously a man from whom I could learn.

"No good!" he replied. "Right eye gone. Pop in—pop out. Marble! Ever seen one?"

He handed me his right eye, and I bowed to it. I couldn't think of anything else to do.

"Try a left-hand gun," I suggested.

"Yes. Some day. Where did you learn to shoot?"

"I'm a farmer's son."

"And what do you do now?"

"Sell stone."

"Tombstones, ha?" he exploded joyfully. "But you look like a soldier."

"Well, I've been that, too."

"What rank?"

"Lieutenant-Colonel of sorts."

"Didn't I say so? Once a colonel, always a colonel," he decreed. "Commanded your battalion?"

"As a matter of fact, I did."

"Decorations?"

"Damn you, what business is it of yours?" I retorted. "Who the hell are you?"

"Me? A murderer."

I thought I had got him placed at last. The Donsett Mental Hospital wasn't far away, and they used to let out the less eccentric inmates for quiet country walks.

"First or second?" I asked.

"Eh? First, of course! Who wants to be a second murderer?"

"All the risk and none of the fun," I agreed soothingly. "What did you do to your victim?"

"Shot him. Shot him in the back right here somewhere."

"Why?"

"That's just what I don't know. I've been looking for a chap

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like you to tell me," he answered, staring me straight in the eyes with a flash of the sanest and grimmest humour I ever saw.

So he wasn't a lunatic. So he knew that someone had met his death on my shoot. Was he a detective, or one of Heyne-Hassingham's people? How much did he know, and how did he know anything at all? Was it true that he himself had been accused of firing the shot?

It was impossible to answer any of those questions, so I tried to keep my face in its same casual expression, and play for time.

"Who was he?" I asked.

"I don't know. There's a lot of people I'd shoot on sight. Back or front, ha!"

"But *did* you kill him?"

"No. Did you?"

"Do I look as if I'd shoot a man in the back?" I replied with all the indignation I could pretend.

"Yes. Don't be a hypocrite! Never shot a German in the back? Must happen. Law of averages. Sometimes they're coming. Sometimes they're going. Colonel, I have watched the face of every man who visits this hill top. You are the only one who would stick at nothing, and whose aim I'd trust—and, if I may say so, whom I'd trust myself."

"Shall we tell your story to the police?" I asked.

"Think they'd understand it, do you, ha? I don't!"

"Will you tell it to me, then?"

"Certainly. Let us sit down."

"Not here," I said.

"Why? Wind too cold, or—?"

"Or," I answered, taking the gamble.

I LED him through the gate and over on to the steep western slope of the down. A narrow sheep path twisted into the heart of one of the clumps of furze, and opened out on to a patch of turf the size of a small room. There we were safe from observation, and overlooked the lower road that wound along the stream, past Blossom's farm, from village to village.

"Who are you?" I asked again.

"To hell with it!" he answered as if taking a sudden decision. "General-of-Cavalry Peter Sandorski of the Polish Army."

"You're in one of these resettlement camps?"

"Resettle my backside!" he replied.

"I was only wondering where you picked up English," I explained.

"English governess."

"She must have been an exceptional woman. Whom did you fight for?"

"Poland," he answered drily.

"I meant—with what army after the defeat."

"The partition," he corrected me. "Oh, first the Russians, then the Germans. No other way of killing both, was there?"

Then he told me as much of his story as he thought fit for me

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to hear. I don't know how many secret organizations he served when it suited him—indeed, I doubt if he knew himself—but one was his own, formed by him and led by him. This private intelligence unit of his had picked up in the western zone of Germany an S.S. man with whom they had a seven-year-old account to settle.

Now, the real reason why Sandorski's people—who, he insisted, were plain non-party Polish officers and good Europeans—had kidnapped this brute was punishment, revenge, whatever you like to call it; and in due season they quietly dropped his weighted body into the Danube.

"I am a Pole, not a judge at Nuremberg," Sandorski said to me sharply, noticing my shocked and—now I come to think of it—hypocritical expression.

Before they disposed of him, however, they interrogated him. He talked quite freely. Being a foolish and sentimental German, he didn't think anybody would bother to kidnap and punish him for crimes he had committed seven years earlier. He assumed that these free-lance Poles had picked him up because they wanted to question him about his recent doings, and he was ready enough to answer. He probably hoped they might employ him as a professional thug. And so he confessed a story that no one had ever suspected.

He had been flown, he said, to England for a special job, landing he didn't know where; nor did he know what the special job was to be. Immediately after his arrival he had been given a temporary assignment—and that was to catch Sandorski with the body of a man he had murdered the previous night.

The S.S. man was asked who told him that the killer was Sandorski. He replied that the dead man had had a companion who escaped, and that the companion had said it was Sandorski. He didn't know the names of either the dead man or his companion.

From whom, then, did he take his orders, the interrogator asked. From an Englishman, he replied, with the cover name of Pink. A former naval officer, he believed. Pink was his contact, and Pink and he had gone out together to discover what Sandorski had been doing, and to catch him if they got a chance.

Had they seen him? Yes, and chased him. But Pink had been very doubtful if it was Sandorski at all. They had only got a glimpse of his back, once bent down as he ran and once leaning over the handlebars of a bicycle. He had wrecked their motor bike and sidecar, and vanished.

"Now then," said Peter Sandorski, cutting short his narrative, "I have friends everywhere. Even in your English intelligence services, when I behave myself. I asked them where, on the 19th October, a motor cycle was abandoned. No driver. No claim. The answer was precise. Of military exactitude, with a map reference. So here I am. Colonel, if you could tell me whom I am supposed to have killed, you would do a service to your country. I tell you that"—he jumped up among the furze bushes and stood to attention—"on my honour as an officer."

I had no intention of confessing to him that I myself was the

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killer. I determined to measure out the information I would give. I had nothing to go on but liking and disapproval of him. This gallant little eccentric seemed to have a disregard for human life that was two hundred years out of date. But it could have been worse. He might have had a wholly modern disregard.

"Age about forty," I said. "Solid build and especially broad across the hips. Dressed in a wind-breaker and tweed trousers. I can't tell you much about his colouring."

"Height?" he asked.

"Medium. About an inch taller than you."

"That is tall," he insisted severely. "Nose? Chin?"

"Nose, nothing in particular. Jaw, square."

"Can I have a look at him?"

"No."

"Dig him up," he suggested.

"How should I know where he is?"

"Mention of a spade. Who grabbed it on the road?"

"You did. And Pink will swear to it in court if it suits him."

"Colonel, my governess had a word for you."

"Yes," I said. "But I've a wife and family."

"Right! Seen it a dozen times. Just love and kisses, and a man's a bloody hero. Give him a couple of children, and he's got to know what he's fighting for. Now, you're in this, but I don't believe you know what you're in or why."

I didn't reply. The general's intuition or judgment of character was far too dangerous.

"Now, how am I going to put it?" he went on. "Ever read state trials? Russia and elsewhere. Think the evidence is all faked, ha? Well, it isn't. Men who confess they are guilty *are* guilty. What of? There we have it! Guilty of muddle. Why? Because the bosses are muddled. There's no firm creed. That's the thing to remember. A creed is what the leader says it is, and no more. That makes it easy to muscle in on the racket. Just like Hitler and Mussolini. You have to start as a socialist—that's all—and then you have to muddle. Tell the working man that you're going to avoid all the errors of communism and democracy, and that you're just going to exercise a little benevolent dictatorship until things are running properly."

"You're employed by your government?" I asked.

"Colonel, I would be shot on sight if I set foot in Poland."

"Then revolution ought to suit you."

"Well, it doesn't. Revolution would be the end of Poland. We Poles are all patriots. We play for time. We wait for destiny. We want stability. A group of Hitlers, all jumping up simultaneously, all promising peace and plenty, where would that get you or me, ha? I tell you, there's one of 'em ready in every country from Georgia to Ireland."

"Who's ours?" I asked sceptically. "Pink?"

"Pink? These men are near the top! I don't know yet who yours is."

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"Ever heard of Robert Heyne-Hassingham?" I asked.

He had; but the name meant little to him. He only knew, through his investigations into the neo-fascist cells abroad, that there was a corresponding underground in England, and that it carried on under cover of some respectable movement.

"Or of a Colonel Hiart?"

"Hiart? Head of your intelligence service in . . . during the war. What's he doing now? Brilliant fellow, but crazy with nerves. Hated firearms because they went bang. Always seeing assassins under his bed, ha?"

"The sort of chap who might imagine General Sandorski when the general was on the other side of the Channel?"

"Colonel, I order you—I beg you, tell me what you know."

"I know something damned odd is going on over my shoot," I replied. "And that's all. Where are you staying?"

"The mental hospital," he announced with a sly pride. "My doctor is there."

All my original doubts came back.

"Of course," I agreed. "They are right up to date."

He leapt to his feet in a passion, and popped down again as flat on his face as if he had just been missed by a sniper.

"Chap up there," he said.

I raised a cautious head and peered through the furze. There was indeed a chap up there, going for a leisurely country walk. I recognized him at once as the man who had watched Blossom's gate and bridge.

"When I say my doctor," Sandorski hissed, "I mean my doctor before the war. If I were mad, you bloody fool, would they have made me a general?"

"I don't know," I said. "I've never studied the Polish campaign."

That went right over his head. He was much too angry. When the walker had passed us and was safely out of earshot, he told me that his pre-war doctor had joined the staff of the Donsett Mental Hospital with a bunch of other highly-qualified refugees from Poland and Lithuania; till he learned English, he was acting only as a superior orderly, but he had a pleasant cottage in the grounds, and there was no reason in the world why he shouldn't have a friend to stay with him.

"Can I see you there?" I asked.

"Why not? Any time you like."

"Be there between nine and ten tomorrow."

And I told him that he mustn't go near my house, which might be watched. I also warned him that he might be seen by someone who knew him.

"Colonel, my lad," he replied superbly, "you are an infantryman. When the cavalry charges, it is always likely to be seen."

"And now do something for me," I asked. "Telephone this number, and tell my wife that Mr. Taine won't be back till after dark, and tell her that they tried oil on the ants, who complained it was the wrong grade for summer."

He was very suspicious. After all, I had explained nothing.

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"Just a father's ruse to prove his identity," I assured him.

I SHOWED him a route back to the loony-bin, where he would be safe from observation till he was well away from Blossom's farm, and myself went off in the opposite direction. I was interested by that country walker. I saw him finish his stroll along the edge of the escarpment, and vanish into a little copse at the point where the slope curved round to the east. I hurried after, keeping well under the brow of the hill where he couldn't see me, and reached a clump of rough stuff below and outside the copse.

He was, as I expected, just within the trees—an excellent position from which he could watch the road at the bottom of the valley and the green track along the top. Once or twice he raised his field-glasses to examine traffic on the road. Apart from that slight movement, he was so absorbed by duty that an incautious rabbit put its head out of a bramble bush within five yards of him.

That was a wonderful chance to study his reactions. I shot the rabbit dead, and had the satisfaction of seeing him jump and drop his glasses. He didn't make any instinctive leap for cover, however, so it was reasonably clear he had heard nothing of any acts of violence in the neighbourhood.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "I'm sorry! I didn't see you."

I picked up the rabbit, and smiled at him with what I hoped was an expression of innocence and concern.

"This is intolerable," he complained. "Have you no thought at all of the suffering you cause to harmless creatures?"

His voice was like the whine of a bagpipe, and his little feet danced to it with indignation.

"We all must eat," I said.

"Have you not enough to eat with what the government allows you? A carefully balanced diet approved by all the statisticians? Killing for food should be left to those who can distribute economically, and understand it."

"At least I understand it," I replied with a grin, swinging the rabbit at him. "He didn't suffer at all."

He was a lovely little man. I didn't want to lose him till he had told me everything he knew; so I apologized, and asked to be shown the light. He recommended several pamphlets which, I gathered, pleaded for the trap as more humane than the gun. I promised to read them. Then I asked him if he were on holiday.

"As much as I allow myself," he replied. "I am studying the collection of essential statistics for a backward rural area."

"Splendid! Who for?"

"The Workers' Improvement Society."

"A labour organization?"

"Certainly not! It is one of the extra-parliamentary activities of the People's Union."

You had only to see him to hear his limited little mind at talk, to know that he couldn't be anything else but sincere. I am sure I should have accepted him at face value if I hadn't known better, and

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if I hadn't known—for about an hour—that the People's Union was as subtle and dangerous as the young Nazi or Communist parties.

"What are you checking up here?" I asked.

"Parallel movement, and the proportion of pedestrians and transport using a non-metalled track in preference to a secondary road, and their reasons."

"And anyone out for a country walk—how does he fit in?"

"I ask him firmly what he is doing," he replied, "and explain my motives with official courtesy. I make a note of his income bracket and appearance, and enter his name in the column Non-Economic Activities."

"How long have you been at it?"

"Since October 19th."

"Description of every person seen, ha?"

I had caught that confounded *ha?* from Sandorski.

"I am assured it is essential to avoid duplication."

"Sounds as if you were being trained for the police," I said.

He blushed, positively blushed. Blowed if I hadn't penetrated the secret hopes that had been held out to him!

"The police are politically untrained and unreliable," he said.

It was enough. I couldn't have kept a straight face any longer—though it was really a matter for tears that such a man could ask his silly questions and be treated with deference in our once merry England. I said good-bye, renewed my apologies, and kept him under observation from a distance. Before long he marched down to the village, as importantly as the steep slope allowed.

Since listening to Sandorski I had made a pretty confident guess at what the value of my shoot was to the interested parties. Sandorski had talked quite casually of agents being flown in and out of England. The down was no landing field, but there was a level strip a good third of a mile long, with a rough but well-drained surface. It was quite good enough for any aircraft with a low landing speed. I also remembered Heyne-Hassingham's conversation with Blossom. Hadn't he been very anxious to know that there were no sheep or cattle on the down?

It was dusk, the best time to see and not be seen. I decided that I might risk a look at the northern end of the supposed airstrip. The uninterrupted level passed diagonally across the shoot, and ended in that Kaffir kraal of domed bramble bushes from which Pink and his late thug had been coming when they surprised me.

I found what I wanted, a bush with the interior hollowed out. The entrance was well hidden, and to be detected only by the trampled grass. A casual eye would have put the disturbance down to cows.

Inside was enough empty space for a man to kneel without getting thorns in his head or twigs down his collar. The light, which outside was fast fading, was a deep elephant grey, revealing neither outline nor perspective. I hadn't a torch with me, so I lit match after match, placing the burnt ends carefully in my pocket. The hole had been cleaned up—so far as it was possible to clean a floor of indefinite vegetable debris—but I got my evidence: half

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an inch of insulated copper wire, a bit of thin broken glass that suggested a bulb or radio valve, four holes in the ground, and some filings and chips of bright metal that would have been indistinguishable in daylight, and twinkled like stars in the light of a match.

Then, pushing accidentally against the side of the hollow, I found still clearer and wholly unsuspected evidence. There was a little alcove or bay, stuffed up with dead bramble stalks. I parted them carefully and saw, driven into the ground and levelled, four supports, identical with those I had buried by the side of their owner in the rabbit warren, all ready for what they were to hold.

Now I had a picture and the beginning of a pattern; and immediately the dull weight upon my conscience vanished. Whether morally it should have done so, I doubt; for I was neither more nor less guilty than before of causing the death of a man. But, from this moment on, crime assumed the amoral, inconsequent quality of a death that one has caused in war.

WHEN I got home—after some cautious reconnaissance to ensure that nobody was interested in the time I returned—I was horrified to notice how drawn and weary my Cecily looked. She must have had that worry upon her face for a couple of weeks, and I hadn't noticed it. It would be truer to say that I hadn't wished to notice it. I had a wild romp with Jerry and George, and was told off by her in the normal way for exciting them before they went to bed. There was a note of relief in her half-angry protest. The house seemed to have returned to its accustomed casual happiness.

"Your friend has a nice voice," she said to me when we were alone, "but he shouldn't pretend to be English."

"Good lord, he could pass anywhere!"

"Not with women. He's too gallant."

"On the telephone?"

"He told me what I looked like from the way I spoke."

"And do you?"

"I hope so," she laughed.

In the morning—much to Cecily's annoyance on a Sunday—I had business between nine and ten. I called on Sandorski, and found him in a turtle-neck sweater glowing with foxy health, after, no doubt, some crazily strenuous daily dozen and a hearty lunatic's breakfast. His host, the doctor, having been on night duty, was asleep.

"My shoot," I told him, "is a landing ground. They mean to put movable radio beacons at both ends of the strip. When you shot that friend of yours he was arranging an emplacement for the southern beacon. The strip has not yet been used, but it's going to be, and the landowner is in this up to the neck."

"It won't be used," he answered, "because they know somebody found them out."

"Nobody found them out. They have been wondering whether I mightn't be guilty. If it wasn't me, it could be a poacher."

Then I had to tell him how the accident really happened. He guffawed at my words of regret.

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"Lord!" he yelled. "I once did the same thing to my uncle! Lord! We both had our breakfast off the mantelpiece for weeks!"

Then he bounced about like a little boy with an urgent need, shouting: "Air pistol! Air pistol! Air pistol! Riemann! That's the man you shot. Colonel, my lad, if Riemann has had it, you've done me a favour. Now, whom was he with?"

"Your Colonel Hiart," I replied, "if this is him. Tall, thin, sunburnt, dark. Very sensitive and intelligent face. Can stand still indefinitely, which most people can't. And likely to know that Peter Sandorski was after his companion."

"That's him! No soldier—never was! But knows everything! Guesses what I'm working on. Guesses I might catch up with Riemann any day. General of Cavalry—that would frighten him, ha? Cleverest man in Europe, when he isn't too scared to think."

"Right! Now, suppose he went over the ground in daylight, there must have been plenty of evidence for a trained eye. I don't believe I ever picked up the empty cartridge. And when he'd pulled himself together, he might remember the difference of sound between a gun and a rifle. And wouldn't he check up where you were at the time? It's a fair old puzzle, but he ought to know the death or disappearance of Riemann had nothing to do with the airstrip."

"Hiart, ha?" he answered, as if the man's reactions were not to be judged by ordinary standards. "He wouldn't rule out straight revenge on Riemann. And I don't think they'll use the airstrip."

"Then why have they put back the supports for the beacon?"

"How do you know they ever took 'em away?"

"Because they'd have taken a horrid risk if they didn't. That's what Pink and your S.S. man were doing just before they nearly caught me—pulling up the supports and hiding them somewhere."

He snorted agreement. "Who's employing Hiart?" he asked.

I gave him a picture of Heyne-Hassingham and a lecture on the People's Union, bringing in the earnest statistician as an example. It all fitted—an organization at bottom hysterical, but in practice efficient, impudent and with an appeal to the ruthless idealist.

"The rest, during the week, is up to you, general," I said, "because I have to earn my living. What we want to know is when those beacons go into position. And I'll tell you what time to watch. Not in daylight, because there are too many people about. Not at night, because they won't want to show a lot of artificial light. But at dusk, after the farm labourers have gone home. And I think they'll also want to be sure that I am in my office and not taking an afternoon off."

"And what then?"

"We go to the police, I suppose."

"Colonel, my lad," he smiled, "just work it out! What will the police do? Send up a couple of constables to check your story. Somebody will see 'em or hear 'em, and that's the end of the airstrip.

"What's the next move, ha? Anonymous information to the police that Colonel Taine may be using his shoot as a little private Garden of Remembrance. With all the details. You try and deny

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'em. Especially if they say you bumped him off on the 19th, when the motor cycle was found, not the 18th. Where's your alibi? What's your story? People's Union? You must be a political maniac. Heyne-Hassingham and Hiart? Above suspicion. Where did you put that body, by the way?"

"Where it will take a lot of finding," I answered sulkily.

"Think so? I've had some experience. So has Scotland Yard. I'll tell you the alternatives. Under the manure heap in the barn. In the middle of a bush—but unless you were in a tearing hurry, we'll rule that out. Any heap of stones. Or the pit where the dead sheep are. Ha? Hà, pokerface? Now, you leave it all to me."

Sandorski pointed out that for a job of this kind—and he said he had organized enough of them to know—an aircraft had to have a fairly respectable base and a reason for leaving it. Therefore it would take off in daylight. Therefore it would arrive before midnight. And if it were going to land within five hundred yards of a road, the organisers must be sure of a dark night with no moon. That gave Wednesday, Thursday or Friday as the most likely dates. He didn't think they would risk leaving the beacons in position. They wouldn't bring them out to the field until the night the 'plane was expected. I was just, he repeated, to leave it to him.

I did so, with some misgivings on the Polish Cavalry's conception of intelligence work. We agreed that Sandorski would telephone me at my home if the beacons were put up, and that I would join him within an hour at the haystacks above Blossom's farmhouse. Just in case they had a man to spare for watching my door, I said I would go out at the back and walk across the hills to the shoot.

ON the Wednesday, soon after I returned to the office from lunch, I had a telephone call from someone who sounded like a harassed and indecisive farmer and asked me if I would be in at five, as he wished to consult me about new types of flooring for poultry runs. He seemed to be in a great hurry and rang off without giving his name. When nobody turned up at five, it occurred to me that the caller intended to find out whether I should be safely in my office at dusk. It was a very useful warning that something might happen. I prepared the way for plenty of free time by telling my clerk that I felt rotten and thought I might be starting a go of 'flu.

I went home in a curious mood of high hopes and misgivings, and when my telephone rang about seven I jumped to it.

"All set to go," said Sandorski's voice. "How's the ants? Here's a horn for their car!"

And he blew a colossal raspberry that must have nearly wrecked the diaphragm of my telephone.

I warned Cecily that if anyone called or telephoned she was to say I had gone to bed with a touch of 'flu and was asleep.

"Darling, don't forget there are three of us who depend on you," she said.

I told her I never thought of anything else.

I slipped out of the back door, crossed the meadows and waded

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the stream. As the crow flies, the distance to Blossom's farm wasn't more than three miles, but the crow didn't make Dorset footpaths, and I had to step out smartly to reach the haystacks in an hour.

It was a dark, blustery evening, with a few fierce showers and comparative calm between. The weather report was of strong winds over the North Sea, rising at times to gale force. With us it was a good enough night for a clandestine landing, but I didn't think it would appear so at the point of departure.

I arrived at the stacks silently and on the hour. I couldn't see Sandorski, and he gave me the worst fright of the evening when he spoke from the level of my feet. He was lying on an old tarpaulin, which I had already touched to be sure that tarpaulin it was, and absolutely invisible.

He told me that the beacons had been set up at dusk, just as I had prophesied; they were, he thought, of transpontor type, and each had been easily carried by two men. All this he had seen from the top of a beech in the boundary hedge, where he had been on watch every afternoon and evening. After it was darkish, he had heard the party going back to the upper road. Thereupon he trotted down to the village to telephone me.

"Any plan?" I asked.

"Not yet. What are we up against? Don't know!"

We took position not far from the southern beacon. About nine we heard their footsteps. They must have moved very quietly as far as the boundary hedge. Then they had to cross a strip of ploughland strewn with large flints. I had never discovered a way of walking silently over those flints, and nor did they.

So far as we could tell, they crossed the plough and settled down somewhere on the edge of the grass. Since I knew every foot of the surface and Sandorski did not, I left him in our hiding-place and explored, stopping frequently to listen. I spotted them first by the flare of a match. They felt confident enough to smoke. I crawled over the turf till I was within twenty yards of them. They were still a party of four. In the glow of the cigarette ends I felt pretty certain that I recognized Hiart.

Their voices were low, and I could only distinguish a few sentences in the hush between the passing gusts of wind. I gathered, at any rate, that the 'plane was starting from Austria, that it would refuel in France on the return journey, and that they, too, thought it wouldn't come. They were prepared to come and wait for it again on the following night.

I returned to the general with my news. We sat where we were, and about an hour before midnight someone came to the beacon and presumably switched off the battery. He didn't go through the gap in the boundary hedge and off to the road, but back to rejoin the rest of his party on the down. Sandorski leapt at the opportunity to get away before them, see what was the number of their car and whether there was anyone waiting in it.

It was too bold, even on so dark a night, for after we passed the gap they weren't more than a hundred yards behind us. We silently

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increased our lead and then, finding no car at all at the junction of the track and the upper road, dropped into the ditch and let them pass us. We trailed them at a reasonable distance—at least it seemed reasonable to Sandorski—and discovered that they had left their car half a mile down the road, just up a little metalled track which ran through a patch of woodland. When they drove away, there were still only four men in the car, so we knew that it had been left unguarded.

I SLEPT deeply and late, foreseeing that the next night I might have little chance, and at my office pretended to be bravely carrying on in spite of that incipient 'flu. My clerk was sympathetic. He was over sixty, reliable and fatherly. He said that my eyes were altogether too clear and bright, and that I looked like an aunt of his just before she died. It might, I thought, well be so. I've seen plenty of men whose eyes were clear and bright just before they died. Only they didn't know they were going to.

His confounded aunt put ideas into my head. I wrote down for Cecily a short account of what had happened, sealed it up, and took the envelope round to the Bank.

In the evening I played with the boys, and ate an early supper. I told Cecily that I had to go out, and that I hoped this would be the last night of the investigation. She didn't know quite what to make of my mood, for I was in good spirits. It seemed to me more and more unlikely that I should ever be in the dock for manslaughter. Anything else that was coming to me I could handle.

Soon after half past seven I was with Sandorski, tucked into the hedge above the southern beacon. An hour later the party arrived, and stood quite close to us while they checked and switched on the beacon. Pink and Hiart we recognized beyond doubt. The other two were unknown to either of us.

The night was clear, with a niggling north-west wind which was damp and cold out of all proportion to its strength. The four men didn't lie out again on the edge of their airstrip; they retired to the comfortable shelter of the boundary hedge.

It was their distance from the beacons and the top of the down that gave Sandorski his crazy inspiration. He suddenly slapped me on the back. "Why not?" he asked me in a yell of a whisper. "Why not shift the beacons?"

"Wreck the 'plane?"

"Hell, no! Welcome it! Reception committee, ha? We ought to have three minutes. Might have much more."

I protested at the outrageous gamble.

"Gamble? What gamble? They can't know the 'plane is coming down in the wrong place till it's down there."

"But why? What's the objective?"

"Muck 'em up! What else? Sit on our backsides in a bramble bush? Just see him land and take off again? Pah! That's what Hiart would do. We want to know what or whom they are flying over. Good God, man, are you going to put your miserable private affairs before service to your country?"

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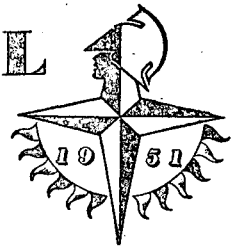

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I never in my life heard such a lousy argument. I was still by no means convinced that I was serving my country, and even less that his wild scheme would benefit anyone but the four men waiting in the hedge. Yet he left me with no possible reply. I didn't wonder the Poles made him a general. He could only be that or a trooper. All other ranks are supposed to think with their brains.

"Now where shall we make the poor beggar land?" he asked cheerfully, as if it were all settled.

"There's only one possible place. Where the down continues the other side of the northern hedge. But there are cows there."

"Well, if he hits one, he hits one. What do you know about radio beacons?"

"Nothing."

"Stands to reason that if they work in one place, they work in another. Ha? Doesn't it?"

"Suppose they come and look at them again?"

"Well, they didn't last night, so why should they tonight?"

We lifted the southern beacon and its supports, and made a detour round the landing strip, following the grass track along the edge of the down. All the time I listened for the 'plane. Once we both cursed, but it was an air-liner on its way to the north.

We set up the beacon in the northern hedge. The supports were admirably fitted for their purpose. Their sharp points bit firmly into the turf of the bank, and with two long legs, one short and one slightly shorter, we had the thing straight enough for any practical use.

In that dark Kaffir kraal of bramble bushes it wasn't so easy to find the other beacon, and the time was now half past nine. At last we got it, and fixed it up on the very brink of the valley. Here the steep escarpment swept round to the east, abruptly ending Blossom's down. We could only give that unknown and unfortunate pilot something under four hundred yards, instead of the five to six hundred that the proper reception committee had allowed. After we got the beacon in position, I paced out the distance and shifted a couple of sleepy cows.

We then had time to sit down and work out the odds. If the 'plane landed according to the signals from the beacons, and if it didn't go over the edge—two very big "ifs"—we had rather more than the three minutes which Peter Sandorski had demanded. The four men in the boundary hedge would come up to the level of their airstrip when they expected or heard the 'plane, but even there they would be a quarter of a mile from us, plus the distance that the 'plane travelled. When the pilot overshot their strip, they would think he meant to turn and come back, so that they wouldn't begin to run up until he actually landed. Sandorski's plan began to look less like a nightmare.

A LITTLE after ten the 'plane circled once, and came in over the hedge like a great silent owl. The pilot revved up as he touched, and taxied forward till his wing was nearly over the beacon.

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He saw or sensed the appalling drop in front of him, lurched round, switched on his light and spent an intolerable time manœuvring into a position where there wasn't a cow or a thornbush or sudden death in front of him.

As soon as his wheels came to rest, he put out his light. We hammered excitedly on the door. Sandorski left it to me to do the talking in case his voice should be recognized. The door was opened from within, and a man peered doubtfully out into the night.

"Quick!" I shouted. "We haven't a moment. Police on the way! Jump, man!"

He dropped to the ground, carrying a small suitcase with him.

The pilot stuck his head out.

"Here!" he protested. "Call this a landing strip. Not again!"

"Get out of here, you fool!" I yelled hysterically. "You'll be arrested in a minute. Get out!"

"What's ahead?"

"Three hundred yards and then a hedge. Jump it if you can't fly it."

"Cripes!" he said. "I'll bring a horse next time."

We had created a fine atmosphere of alarm and despondency. The 'plane roared and began to move. The pilot flooded the turf with light again, and revealed the real reception committee running towards us less than a hundred yards away. He took no risk of being stopped. I wonder he didn't kill the lot of them. But he cleared the hedge. While we ran, I heard the steady drone of the 'plane in its safe and lonely world, and envied him.

We took the nearest way, straight down the slope. That for the moment increased our lead, and I got rid of the passenger's suitcase into a thick holly which I knew I could find again even in the dark. Relieved of that, he ran like a man with a guilty conscience.

We swerved back, following the contour line below the copse where my innocent statistician had sat and counted traffic, and began to pound up the slope at an angle. This was stumbling, not running; and our pursuers drew up into close touch. They had had time to think and began to call: "Lex! Lex!"

"That vos the voice of Peenk," said the passenger in a firm Central European accent, and half stopping.

I shoved him on. "Run, Lex! Pink's the police informer. I'm getting you to Heyne-Hassingham."

Thank the lord he was high up in the party! That name seemed to be immediate proof of my *bona fides*. He crashed along the side of that hill like a startled heifer, through bush and over rabbit-hole. I pulled them round behind a thorn brake, through a gap in the furze and down on to the ground. As we dropped flat on the turf, Lex gave a muffled cry of pain.

"Damn those thorns!" hissed Sandorski.

He dug me in the ribs and held out, behind our friend's back, a little syringe with which he had just jabbed him in the thigh.

The hunt passed us, then checked and turned back. They knew, as soon as they stopped to listen, that we must have gone to ground

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on the hillside. In the stillness of the night you could hear a man charging across country half a mile away. If only we could have reached the springy turf of the green track above us, we could have run—or jumped or danced, for that matter—without a sound.

They closed in, and flashed torches quickly on and off. They were wise not to spoil their night sight; and it may be, too, that they feared we were armed and desperate. All they could see was a formless black mass of thorn and furze, forbidding search. Two of them were above us and two below us. They made a half-hearted attempt to beat the patch, but the furze was stiff and centuries old; we might have been surrounded by a lion-proof thorn fence.

It was as well that Sandorski's syringe had done its work, for they started to ask Lex what the devil he thought he was doing. They couldn't say very much, for they didn't know who was with him or why the 'plane had come down in the wrong place or why it had immediately and frantically taken off again. Indeed, they couldn't be certain that Lex had ever got out of the 'plane at all.

Hiart's querulous voice, above us, said:

"For heaven's sake, don't go throwing names about!"

Pink, from below us and in a furious temper, told him to beggar off home to his bleeding nanny.

All the same, it wasn't funny. True, they couldn't see us till they stepped on us, but they had only to wait till daylight.

We heard somebody moving round our patch of cover and giving orders in whispers. I think it was Hiart, for their next move showed a certain subtlety. They shifted noisily about until we hadn't the faintest notion where any single one of them was, and then preserved the most absolute, disciplined silence. We were out of the wind on that slope, and there wasn't a sound. This went on for half an hour. At least I found it to be only half an hour when I looked at my watch. I thought it must be nearly dawn.

Then Lex began to thrash about in his dreamland, and somebody above us closed in towards the sound. I hung on to Lex's legs and Sandorski lay across his chest and arms. Pink must have been near enough to hear Lex's heavy breathing. He shot in our general direction, and scored a bull. He hit the rectangle between Sandorski's legs, Lex's body and my arms. It wasn't his fault that there was nothing but turf in it.

The shot was the breaking-point for somebody else who had been frozen and terrified like ourselves. A roe deer, away to our left in a patch of thick stuff where one of us easily might have been but was not, broke cover and crashed away. Sandorski, instantaneously appreciating what the enemy would think, broke cover, too, and went after it, drawing off two of the watchers, who could only assume that two of us had gone.

Right! Make it a third, I thought! And down the hill I went—after, of course, the interval of some seconds which I needed to catch up with Sandorski's brilliance. I drew off the other two sentries. One of them was Pink. His naval language was unmistakable. I led

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them up again to the turf, and there, where I could run silently, easily lost them and returned at leisure to Lex.

LEX gave a heave and a rumble. In the silence which had now become more absolute and hostile than ever, that noise seemed as outrageous a signal as any flashing light. I decided to shift him at once, while I could be sure that my own section of empty space was really empty. I carried him down the hill and left him in the open, where his odd noises would sound like those of the sheep.

I settled down on the edge of the turf track above our temporary hiding-place. After a bit, Hiart, tall enough to recognize, came flitting cautiously over the grass with one of his men. They stopped and listened at the right spot, gave it up and vanished northwards along the track.

Where were they going? Well, if Hiart had the intelligence Sandorski attributed to him, then he would guess that the only explanation of the aircraft coming down in the wrong place and being expected there by unknown persons must be that the beacons had been moved. Having checked that, he would try to find them—for they were evidence that must at all costs be removed—and take them away in his car.

I hoped that Sandorski might be close behind Hiart, but he was not. I waited and waited, feeling all the time that we might be within a few yards of each other, and each afraid to break the silence. I needn't have worried. When Sandorski did come, it was boldly down the track, and singing in a low, but not nearly low enough voice some preposterous chorus:

"*One day in October*
I wasn't so sober."

"For the lord's sake!" I protested.

"English folk-song," he answered. "Learned it from my governess. They're miles away, and busy. Have a cigarette!"

"Where are they?"

"Looking for the beacons, all four of them."

"That won't take them long."

"Won't it, ha? One is half way down the hill, and the other on its side under a pile of cabbage."

"Kale."

"Well, whatever damned kraut you feed to cows in this country. Next thing, colonel, my lad, is to restore your temper."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Our friend under the daisies. Dig him up, and you're a free man. Now's your chance to do what you ought to have done the first time. Burn their car and burn him in it. That'll keep Hiart quiet! That'll make him stay at home. Suspicion? Nonsense! Why you? Life's wide open to inspection. Decent bourgeois selling tombstones. No connection whatever with Poles and such, ha?"

It did look, I must admit, as if I were on to a good thing. I led

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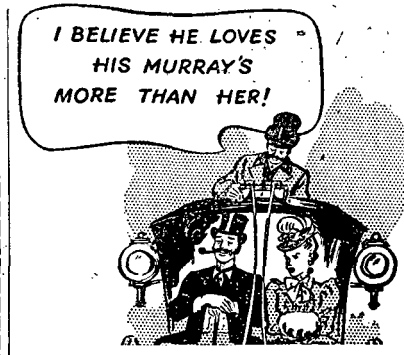

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Sandorski to the rabbit warren. It was a little close to the hedge where the beacon lay under its pile of kale, but Hiart's party were at the far end of the down still searching for the other.

At the bottom of the pit we could safely use a torch. We dug him out with our hands, and I left him to Sandorski for I didn't want to look. I smoothed back the earth and arranged the fallen thorn in its old position.

Sandorski flashed his light on what had been the face. It didn't tell him anything but the common fate of man. He looked further, and found a tattoo mark on the right arm and a locket or identity disc on a light chain round the neck. He took that and put it in his pocket.

"So that is the end of Riemann," he said.

It was he who had the courage to deal with the corpse, he who was glad to see the man dead. Yet there was a sob in his voice.

"What had he done?" I asked.

"Despaired. Wanted a short cut and thought we were too patient. Went over to these people and broke open my organization, for I had trusted him. Not for money and not for country, but just because he thought they were the saviours of the future. Taine, I find myself against every kind of idealism."

It was a terrible confession to cry out, but, in this world of passionately sincere political creeds, it was true. He was in opposition to all of them. Yet he had an ideal, and it was Christendom, the holy and forgotten unity of Europe. Only in such a Europe, where politics were seen to be a mere expedient compared to the beauty of the common heritage, could his people live.

He took out a knife and removed all traces of lead pellets from the body. Then he removed the leg of the beacon from Riemann's heart, and buried it again.

"Hang on to his heels," he said.

We trotted along the boundary hedge to the gap, and when we reached the upper road followed it down to the patch of woodland where they had left their car the previous night. The car was again unguarded. We wrenched off the main petrol lead, bent it and soaked Riemann and the floor mats. Then we put him in the driving seat, and Sandorski threw a lighted cigarette into the pool of petrol beneath the car. The result was spectacular. We were only just far enough away.

We cleared out, back along the hard road where our footprints wouldn't show, then over a wire fence on to firm grass, and so across country to Blossom's land, which we hit near his hill-top barn. The glare lit up our eastern horizon.

★*The second and last part of this story will appear in the June issue of ARGOSY, on sale May 10th.*

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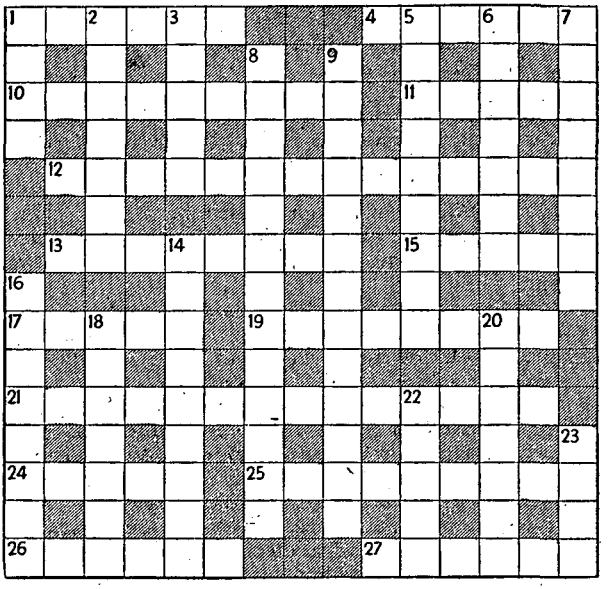
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 82



CLUES

Across

1 Struggles in comfort ? (6).

4 Saved from the spread (6).

10 Not impressed (9).

11 I simply enter the middle of the church (5).

12 They still reap the benefit of horse power (7, 7).

13 Not a cut for tramps ! (4, 4).

15 Ridiculous injunction for the closed shop! (5).

17 Object of dread (5).

19 Strong team ? (8).

21 Model Exhibitions (7, 7).

24 Originated back in the Roman era (5).

25 One girl is the embodiment of basic beliefs (9).

26 Boy in front is served (6).

27 "I am no —, as Brutus is ;" (Julius Cæsar) (6).

Down

1 A sailor's farewell ? (4).

2 Caviare to the general ? Well, increase the ration (7).

3 Cut in military style (5).

5 Discount for the needy (9).

6 "For the stars and the winds are unto her As —, as songs of the harp-player ;" (Swinburne) (7).

7 Maids in the kitchen (8).

8 Left in view (13).

9 The old way—a friend to the end (13).

14 Stop with a period at the start (9).

16 Evidently no barrier to authorship ! (8).

18 "'Tis time ; — ; be stone no more ; approach." (A Winter's Tale) (7).

20 What the dodo did (4, 3).

22 Emotional range (5).

23 No use without this (4).

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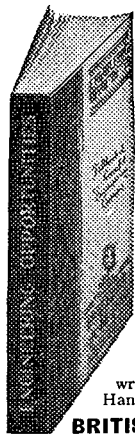

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PRACTICAL RESULTS

Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student 778/2119:* I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student 184/315:* As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student 181/282:* You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they have offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . *Student 591/287:* You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student 120/288:* I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student 1179/347:* I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student 1954/157:* I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**; they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student 171/162:* I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student 1106/156:* The **B.B.C.** accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student 141/76:* The article which I wrote for the Second Test Paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.

Facing

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